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THE

CADET BUTTON.

A NOVEL

OF

AMERICAN ARMY LIFE

223199

BY

FREDERICK WHITTAKER,

AUTHOR OF "LIFE OF GEN. GEO. A. CUSTER," ETC.

NEW YORK:
SHELDON & COMPANY,
No. 8 MURRAY STREET.
1878.

VM

TO THE CADET CORPS
OF THE U. S. MILITARY ACADEMY AT WEST POINT,
PRODIGAL ALIKE OF THEIR BUTTONS AND
THEIR BLOOD, I DEDICATE
THIS STORY.

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GREETING.

THE first thing men will say when they take up this book, is: "Why was it written? Have we not too many books now? You must tell us what is new if you want us to listen."

That is why I have written my story. The daily life of our army is a sealed book to most of our people. In other lands men are proud of their soldiers: we know and care little for ours, we hear so little of them. Yet I have thought that an army tale may be read by some, if not all. Judge you if I have told it well or ill.

The men and women in this book are types of army life, no better nor worse than they really are. If you say that my Indians are not true Indians, that such never lived, I say that the man from whom Mac Diarmid is drawn died in New York not ten years ago, and that the others in my story are alive to-day. I have tried to show them truly, with all their faults and their good points.

If this tale rouse any to speak out against the wrongs that are daily done to those who once held all our land, it will have done all I hope for it. It is right that the men who have broken the fetters of the slave should save the Indian from those who cheat him under the mask of law, and then kill him for fighting against the thieves who have robbed him. May that time soon come, for the fair fame of our land!

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THE CADET BUTTON.

CHAPTER I.

GUARD-MOUNT.

GUARD-MOUNT at the Academy on a bright June morning. The silent gray-coated lines of cadets were looking straight to the front, while a smart, waspish-looking officer was inspecting the guard. Each cadet, as this officer passed in front of him, tossed up his musket into his left hand, to be seized by the inspector with a savage aspect, and then thrown back at the owner as if the other wished to knock him down.

At first sight, all those smooth young faces, slim waists and bright buttons looked as if they might have been cast in one mould; stolid, immovable, devoid of expression. A second glance revealed dark and light, short and tall lads; faces full of talent, faces dull and stupid. Every now and then some youngster would turn his eyes furtively from the regulation "striking the ground fifteen paces in front" to glance at a group of pretty girls from Roe's Hotel, who had gathered near the rear of the officer of the day to see the guard-mount. Not a head turned, but the eyes were not so obedient to discipline.

"How funny they *do* look, Juliet," said one of the girls in a half whisper, with a little giggle of amusement. "They're as stiff as pokers. Who'd think it, to see them last night in the ball room?"

"Hush, Nettie," said the one called Juliet. "They're always so when they're on duty, you little goose."

This young lady spoke sagely, and as one having authority. She had been at "the Point" three weeks. The other had only arrived in time for the "hop" of the night before, on a first visit from school.

"What's he doing now?" whispered back Nettie, as the waspish officer suddenly paused in front of one of the cadets, and began to speak to him.

Juliet pressed her companion's arm.

"Listen!"

"What's the reason of this, sir?" queried the waspish officer in his sharpest tone. As he spoke he pointed sternly to the centre of the delinquent's breast, where a single button was missing from the shining row.

The cadet addressed was a tall, slim, fair-haired young fellow, with a frank, handsome face. He turned red instantly, and glanced down. It was only too true: the button was gone. Then he looked straight to the front again.

"Lost it, sir."

"Fall out, sir. How dare you come on guard in such a condition? Report to your sergeant in arrest, and tell him to send a substitute."

The cadet indicated shouldered his piece without another word, and stepped back out of the ranks; then wheeled about and marched off to the barracks, as stiffly as if on parade, while the waspish officer went on with his inspection with an air of virtuous satisfaction.

"What is it, Juliet? What did he do? What did the other man send him away for?" eagerly asked the young girl who was witnessing her first guard-mount.

Juliet endeavored to smile superior, but she was actually puzzled herself.

"I suppose he's sent him off on a message to some one, dear," she answered.

A stout, red-faced young gentleman near her smiled slightly, and volunteered the information.

"He's been put in arrest for coming on guard with a button off. Rather rough, I should say."

"A button off!" echoed Nettie. "I never knew they punished them for *that!* Why, Con, you must be mistaken. Juliet's got a whole string of them from different cadets."

Con started and flushed a little, as he looked keenly at the girl called Juliet.

"The deuce she has!" he muttered. "Why, she's been here only three weeks."

Nettie laughed a little.

"Oh, one can do a good deal of flirting in three weeks, Con. I only came last night, and I've got one button already from the nicest, sweetest, handsomest young cadet I ever saw—a perfect duck."

Con grinned in a sarcastic manner.

"Just like you girls. You think every plebe's a romantic angel. I'm thankful I haven't got four years of such slavery before *me*, to get into the army."

The girl made a grimace. Very rude, to be sure, but she was fresh from boarding school, remember, and Con was only her cousin.

"Oh, yes, you're sour grapes. You don't know if you'll pass your examination yet."

"Thank you, miss; I passed yesterday," said the heavy young man, with the same rather spiteful smile. "I know *you'd* have been glad if I hadn't done it."

"I don't believe you did it fairly," said the girl in the same tone, and her blue eyes flashed angrily. It was plain that she and the heavy youth were old enemies.

"I *did* it, and that's enough for me," he answered triumphantly. "What's the use of going to this place, when you can get into the army without any slavery at all? Money will do it—pay for a coach, pay for a Congressman, pay for anything."

"Except brains," said the girl quickly; and as she spoke the young man flushed again with anger, and sauntered away pretending to whistle.

Nettie smiled to herself, and then turned to her friend Juliet, just as the guard was marching past in review. She did not notice the glittering lines, though they made a pretty enough sight. She asked in a low tone:

"What does it mean, 'in arrest,' Juliet?"

"Why, in the military prison of course, dear," said the other with serene wisdom. "I believe they have a black hole, or something of the sort, to punish them; but they don't mind it, those cadets."

Nettie—she was a little, slight creature—looked troubled. Something was evidently weighing on her mind, for she seemed to forget all about the ceremony, and suddenly slipped away to the hotel.

. . . . . .

Late in the afternoon of the next day—it was Saturday—the same cadet who had been in trouble at guard-mount was walking post, near the chapel, and the grounds were generally deserted. The young fellow was all right this time as to uniform; the missing button had been replaced, and his coat was spotless, while his white trousers shone from afar in the sun. It was three o'clock, and the thermometer stood at 96 degrees in the shade, nevertheless our cadet was buttoned to the chin and wore a stiff stock. He was pacing up and down disconsolately enough in the glaring sunlight, the only sentry in sight. One might have guessed that he was there for punishment; and so he was—"walking an extra," as it is called at the Point, or

standing sentry when he might have been off duty and enjoying himself.

The afternoon was so sultry that no one was out who could avoid it, and even the delinquent cadet halted every now and then under one of the great elms in front of the chapel, to escape the burning sun. Nevertheless, in one of his turns he caught sight of a young lady, all in white, with a blue-lined pongee parasol, sauntering slowly toward the chapel down the narrow road, known as "Flirtation Walk," that skirts the grounds of the Academy.

The sentry looked hard at the coming figure, and then resumed his lonely tramp, muttering, "By Jove, that girl must be fond of walking to be out now."

He paced slowly along his beat to the front of the library, which was all silent and deserted, the blinds drawn down, the windows of the adjutant's office wide open, revealing the empty room; for the adjutant was off taking a siesta. As he came to the end of his beat the sentry saw that the young lady was nearing the same spot, and he walked slowly, then halted, brought his musket down to a carry, and executed an "about face" as stiff as a ramrod, his face set in official sternness. After this, with the same severe gravity, he stepped off, turning his back on the approaching lady, as if she had not existed for him.

The lady, on her part, came directly forward to the end of the cadet's beat, reaching there about the time he had completed his walk to the barracks. She was a little, slight schoolgirl, with a delicate, small-featured face, which wore a curious, wistful expression as she looked at the stolid sentry, so regardless of her presence.

As he halted at the other end of his beat, and went through the same stiff, mechanical performances which had marked the beginning of his walk, she opened her blue eyes wide, and murmured:

"What a shame to make the poor fellow do that! It

ought to be stopped." Then the sentry began to walk straight toward her, and she began to smile.

Very innocently she advanced to meet him, and thus it happened that the two met right in front of the chapel door, under an elm tree. He marched on, staring straight before him, and she stood to one side, looking at him in a wistful sort of manner.

"He's angry," she said half aloud; "and no wonder. Poor fellow! But I *must* make it up to him."

Then she called out in a very faint voice:

"Mr. Armstrong! Please, Mr. Armstrong!"

The cadet sentry immediately turned in his walk with a little start. He even forgot his "about face," and behaved like an ordinary mortal. Then he remembered himself and stiffened up as he came back, till he looked fully in the young lady's face.

"We're not allowed to talk on post," he began in a low tone, and then suddenly added—"Oh, it's you, Miss Nettie. I beg your pardon. Please don't stop me, or some of the officers might see us."

There was something in the tones of his voice that told that the young man was disappointed. It was some one else he had expected to see. But this little girl—for she was not sixteen yet—was too eager to notice this. She began, with her hands clasped: "Oh, Mr. Armstrong, please, I'm so sorry that you have been punished on my account. Won't you please take your button back and forgive me for getting you into disgrace?"

And she held up to him a cadet button, the innocent cause of that afternoon's extra.

Cadet Armstrong, Third Class, looked at the girl for a moment in apparent astonishment.

"You!" he said. "Why, I thought—oh, I mean—I remember now—I *did* give you a button, didn't I?"

"Yes; and I assure you I didn't mean any harm," said

the girl earnestly; "but I thought that you cadets had plenty of buttons, and were always giving them away to girls—and Juliet had so many, and told me that all the girls were trying who could get the most—and so I asked you—and oh, I'm *so* sorry! I didn't know you hadn't another with you. Won't you please take it back, and forgive me?"

The young sentry had been glancing uneasily up and down the walk in fear of seeing an officer, but he could not help smiling at the innocence of his fair tormentor. He turned squarely toward her to show her his uniform complete.

"I've got another button, Miss Nettie," he said. "It was only my carelessness and forgetfulness that got me into the scrape. It wasn't *your* fault. After all, it's only a few extras to walk. Don't you fret over it. Stop here a minute till I come back. Sit on that seat. I can't stop."

And before she could quite realize his meaning, he had turned his back on her, and was marching stiffly away, just as the figure of an army officer in undress uniform turned the corner from behind the chapel, and passed on toward Roe's Hotel, waving a palm-leaf fan. This officer was fat, and all his white trousers and Panama hat did not prevent his looking the picture of misery, as he perspired his way to Roe's. Being gray-headed, he glanced without interest at the girl; being in the commissary department, he was indifferent to the military aspect of the sentry, wherefore Cadet Armstrong escaped a reprimand for talking on post.

The young sentry made his walk very long and slow, to the extreme limits of his beat, going through the manual like a perfect machine, till his keen eye detected that the white trousers of the commissary had vanished into the hotel barroom. Then he turned and came back at quick time, slowing down as he reached the bench on which Miss

Nettie had seated herself, screened from view by the trunk of an elm tree.

He cast a rapid glance around; and seeing all safe, halted and grounded the butt of his gun.

"You must excuse me, Miss Nettie, for leaving you so suddenly; but we're not allowed to talk on post, and I must look out for officers. How is your cousin, Miss Juliet, this morning?"

His face got red as he spoke, probably from the heat; but Nettie never noticed it.

"Oh, *she's* all right. But tell me, Mr. Armstrong, is it true that they put you in a black hole, on bread and water?"

The young man laughed outright.

"No. Who's been telling you such stuff?"

"My cousin Con, and so did Juliet. That's what frightened me so. I thought how I'd brought it all on you by my nonsense. And you really don't mind my keeping the button?"

He smiled.

"Not the slightest objection. I don't mind the extras. But I say, Miss Nettie, *would* you do me a favor?"

"Oh, certainly"; and the girl beamed with readiness.

"*Would* you mind"—and here the young fellow's face grew still redder—"*would* you mind asking your cousin if she'll be at the graduating hop, and if she won't give me the first waltz. Do! there's a dear little creature. Remember what I've suffered for you." And the graceless scamp looked pathetically at her. But Nettie never hesitated. She seemed to be a hearty, whole-souled little woman, and her schoolgirl heart vibrated at the idea of being the confidante of a real love affair.

"I'll do it for you," she said, "and I'll see *she* does it. Oh, I say, Mr. Armstrong, will you engrave your name on t button for me, since I may keep it?"

"With great pleasure, Miss Nettie," he answered, with all the insinuating smile of a real cadet. "Give me the button, and you shall have it on graduating night. That's a bargain."

"Agreed," she said with a bright smile. "Oh, you poor fellow, how I pity you now! Why, what——"

Armstrong, who had taken the button, suddenly sprang away from her and stiffened up like a stake; then marched off with solemn steps.

As she sat in astonishment, she heard the steady tramp of feet and rattle of arms; and round the corner of the chapel came the relief, headed by the tallest cadet Nettie had ever seen, one who bore the chevrons of a corporal on his sleeves.

"Relief, halt! Armstrong, fall in!" said a clear, deep voice, that of the tall cadet, and Armstrong wheeled into the rear of the little column, which passed in front of the girl.

As it did so, Nettie looked up and met the eyes of the tall corporal—great, luminous black orbs, in the midst of a face dark as an Indian's, surrounded by black, shining hair.

Something in his passing glance made the girl tremble and shiver all over, though it was hot. Then he was gone, and Armstrong with him.

Nettie rose up with a little shudder, and walked quickly back to the hotel.

While she was relating her escapade to her cousin Juliet, Cadet Armstrong was taking off his belts in his room, and saying to his chum, who was none other than the tall corporal with the dark face:

"Well, by Jove, Mac, that little girl's a trump. I'm promised that first waltz with Miss Brinton, old boy. Do you know that?"

Cadet Corporal Mac Diarmid looked up from his calcu-

lus-book, which he was already devouring. "Then I shall go to Benny Havens's that night," was all he said.

Armstrong looked gravely at his companion.

"If I were you, I wouldn't trouble Benny Havens so much, Mac. You'll get one demerit too much some day, and then you'll be sorry for it."

Mac Diarmid laughed a little bitterly.

"A man must have some recreation. Take yours in your way. What should I do at your balls? At Benny's one man's as good as another. I tell you, Armstrong, some day I'll show them——"

He stopped abruptly and turned to his book.

"I won't go to the hop; so you needn't ask me," he snapped out in conclusion. "She's your girl, and I won't interfere."

Armstrong laughed a little uneasily.

"I don't know that I care whether you go to the hop or not. You've got a confoundedly dangerous way with you when women are around."

Mac Diarmid smiled a little scornfully.

"Women are not for me," he said; "at least until I have done my work."

And he turned to his book without another word.

CHAPTER II.

THE DISMISSED CADET.

TWO years had passed since the little episode of the button, and another graduation week had come. The examinations were over, the new officers were commissioned, and had abandoned for ever the musket of the cadet sentry.

The ball was at its height, and the floor of the Mess Hall was crowded with dancers, whirling to the music of the "Schönen Blauen Donau," as Lieutenant Merrill, U. S. A., who had spent a six months' leave in Europe, informed Miss Gushington.

Dandified officers jostled spruce cadets, while any number of angels in divine toilets floated about the room, chattering with all the ardor of young femininity when it first encounters the martial idea, resplendent in gold lace. Around the door of the Mess Hall clustered the miserable ones, plebes in their first year, not even arrived at the comparative comfort of the seated wallflowers, but doomed to the outer darkness of the "gangway brigade," as Merrill called them, for which Miss Gushington pinched him and called *him* a "wicked, satirical creature."

Outside on the steps, in the bright June moonlight, among these plebes, stood a very tall, dark young man in citizen's dress, who was scowling in at the Mess Hall door. He looked like a man in a desperate mood, as he chewed viciously at a fireless cigar and fretted outside there on the steps.

Presently the music ceased, and the bashful brigade be-

gan to disperse, as the overheated dancers came filing out into the moonlight to cool themselves by a stroll on Flirtation Walk. Then the tall man drew back among the plebes, and watched the exodus.

Presently a cavalry officer came out with a lady and strolled off. He was light, and she was a pronounced brunette. Then the watcher started as if he recognized some one.

"Doesn't he make a splendid officer, Mac?" whispered a small plebe at his elbow.

"Tommy, my lad, he does more," answered the tall man earnestly. "Armstrong's a worker and a gentleman. I wish I could say as much for all the products of this place. Look at that—Ah, there he is!"

He broke off all of a sudden. Two officers came out of the Mess Hall, and were passing toward the quarters of the post staff. With them was a portly old gentleman in civil attire, whose walk had a certain air of importance that told unmistakably of one well-to-do in life. The dark man had evidently found what he wanted in this group, for his face grew harder and fiercer as he looked, and he set his teeth with a muttered exclamation that sounded like a malediction.

The three sauntered down the steps and turned round the corner of the Mess Hall. As soon as they disappeared the dark young man stepped forward to follow them with a long, stealthy stride.

"Where are ye going, Mac Diarmid?" said a voice beside him, just as he started, and a hand was laid on his arm.

The man addressed as Mac Diarmid turned and found himself confronted by a short, thickset man, wearing a black straw hat, from under which looked out a queer little face, with high cheekbones, small blue eyes, and a fiery red beard of huge proportions.

"Evan Roy," said Mac Diarmid impatiently, "I go to attend to my honor. Leave my arm."

"My father's son will do no such thing," said Evan Roy composedly. "She'll e'en walk with ye."

And the short man wound his arm into that of his taller companion, and accompanied him, somewhat against Mac Diarmid's inclination. He had spoken with a peculiar rising and falling inflection in his voice, unmistakably Scotch. As they went along he continued, every now and then lapsing into dialect phrases or pronunciations when he grew warm.

"It's clear to be understood that when the Mac Diarmid attends to his honor his kinsmen should follow him; and while Evan Roy Mac Diarmid can put foot to the ground he'll do it. But what has angered the chief?"

They had passed the side of the Mess Hall, and could see the party they were following saunter ahead of them down the road. Mac Diarmid slackened his pace so as to keep about thirty yards behind, and spoke in a low voice.

"You know how and why I was dismissed, Evan Roy?" he asked.

"It was because the covenanting Whig professors would make nae allowance for the humors of a born shentleman and a chief to boot," said Evan in a revengeful tone. "Where was the Academy when the Mac Diarmid came from Troy with Brutus and landed in Albyn? Hech, sirs, the warld's a different thing to-day from what it used to be, and this America's no the country for a born shentleman."

Mac Diarmid writhed his upper lip in a painful sort of half smile.

"It's a good enough country. You forget who I am—an American to the backbone. But, Evan Roy, had it not been for that man in the middle of yonder group, I should not have received that stroke, which wiped out all my

studies, all my work, all my heart's hopes for my mother's race. I can have my revenge on him now, and I'll do it."

"Ye'll remember that it's a far cry to Loch Awe, Mac Diarmid," said Evan Roy cautiously. "Yonder one's amidst his friends, and he will not hear ye nor do ye justice."

"I'm not a fool when I'm angry, Evan," said Mac Diarmid quietly. "He leaves the post to-night. I've staid here to watch him, and I'll have him yet. See!"

As he spoke, the group ahead of them turned off from the road and entered the front garden of one of the cottages, where they stood a few moments admiring the moonlight. Mac Diarmid and his companion walked slowly by the house, and heard them speaking.

"Did you ever see such a lovely night, Judge Brinton?"

"Very charming indeed," said the portly old civilian pompously—"almost equal to the nights at Naples, where Mr. Van Dyck and my family passed last season. You will have fine weather for your journey to the frontier. Where is that—ah—expedition, or whatever you call it——"

"Survey, Judge," said a third voice, deep and rather rough. "It's a branch of the Great Western Survey, and I shouldn't wonder if our regiment furnished the escort. General Slaughter sent me word that I needn't be uneasy about an extension of leave, as the Indians are likely to be quiet unless the survey excites them to——"

Here the voices were lost as the two men in the road passed out of hearing, and Mac Diarmid pressed the arm of Evan Roy, and spoke in a low, grating tone.

"I told you I was no fool, even when I was angry," he said. "I can afford to wait for my time. He's going to the plains. Evan Roy, he shall never come back!"

The red-bearded Scot nodded his head slowly. "Ay, ay, it's the blood of the chiefs, lad. I'll no deny ye get it fairly from both sides. 'Twas a Mac Diarmid, in the reign

of the first kings of Scotland, that flayed his foe alive and nailed his hide to the kirk door."

Mac Diarmid uttered a short laugh, and his face assumed a strange expression.

"He shall follow the foes of the first Mac Diarmid," he said slowly; "and it may be he fares worse."

Evan Roy said nothing, as they passed along down the road to the boat-landing, which they reached just as the little steamer was about leaving the wharf. The silence between them was unbroken till they were in the midst of the river. They were the only passengers at that late hour, and they had the picturesque view all to themselves. It was in midstream, when the academic buildings looked most brilliant in the moonlight, that young Mac Diarmid broke the gloomy silence he had maintained. He raised his clenched fist and shook it at the Academy.

"Curses on you all!" he muttered in a low tone of concentrated passion. "From the highest to the lowest, I spit at you all, and I swear that you shall yet rue the day you drove me out. Ay, all of you!"

Evan Roy stood looking at him with a queer half-scornful expression on his face.

"Hout, tout!" he said. "Cursin' ne'er brake banes, Mac Diarmid. The still dog's the dog that hauds his grip."

The young man started, and his irritation sank to quietude.

"You shall see *me* hold my grip when I get it, Evan," he said.

Then they heard the rattle of chains as the boat entered the dock, and both men passed into the railroad station.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE GARDEN.

KOSCIUSKO'S GARDEN at West Point is the most perfect spot for love-making that was ever invented in this prosaic country of ours. It lies nestled under the steep bank which leads to the Cavalry Plain, and has a perpendicular wall of granite behind it, hollowed into a semicircular alcove, from the foot of which trickles a tiny spring falling into a marble basin. Before the spring are a few square feet of shrubbery and flowers; then down goes the bank, and before you lies the Hudson, with the dark hills towering aloft on the other side. A narrow path, with rude steps cut in the rock, winds up from below, and another goes above.

On this night of all others the garden was a paradise. The great white moon looked into every corner and sent a broad, shimmering glow from the river below to dazzle the eyes of two people who sat on the rustic seat. The leap of a sturgeon in the river, the faint ripple of the water against the bows of a white-sailed sloop stealing across the black bank on the other side, the distant strains of the band from the Mess Hall, only served to make the silence musical. The two people in the garden seemed to feel its influence, for they were very quiet.

The drooping yellow plume on the helmet of one of the pair, his bright buttons and gold lace, told of the cavalry officer in full uniform. At West Point such figures are common enough. Equally to be expected was the second figure, that of a lady in a cloud of white, with a scarlet

shawl around her shoulders, while her black curls betrayed the beautiful brunette who had come from the Mess Hall with young Armstrong.

He was sitting at the end of the bench, a little retired from the young lady, who on her part was gazing at the scenery with an air of placid contentment and great interest. He, on the other hand, was decidedly nervous, for he was biting at his moustache and fidgetting, with his chin resting on his hands crossed on the pommel of his sword-hilt, as he sat staring at the river.

"What a very lovely night it is, Mr. Armstrong," said the young lady presently. "I should think you must be sorry to leave this beautiful place."

"I don't know but I am, in some respects, Miss Brinton," he answered thoughtfully. "Of course we have some happy times here, though to some of us they are few and far between."

"But not to you surely, Mr. Armstrong?"

"Perhaps—— But it's no use to talk of that. It is all past now, and when the cadet leaves the barracks for the last time he thinks only of the future."

"I have always heard officers speak so affectionately of their old days at the Academy. I thought they were all happy here, in democratic equality," said the lady in an inquiring tone.

Young Armstrong smiled a little bitterly. "Democracy never exists at school, Miss Brinton, and after all West Point is only a big school, with stricter discipline. There is the aristocracy of muscle and that of social position at home. Both are as potent here as in any other school: they may not affect the standing of a man with professors, but they make his comfort or discomfort."

The young lady shifted the conversation, seeing she was treading on dangerous ground.

"Mr. Armstrong, tell me—who was that very dark

Spanish-looking man, not in uniform, who bowed to you as you came out of the Mess Hall to-night? He had a very strange face. It reminded me of Byron's ideal of Lucifer."

Armstrong hesitated.

"Mac Diarmid—a sad—— But pardon me. You would not care to hear his story. It——"

"On the contrary, I should like it very much. I took a wonderful interest in that dark face of his. He looked like a man capable of great good or evil."

"He is both, Miss Brinton. He is, in fact, the only real friend I ever had at the Point."

"But why was he not in uniform?"

"He was dismissed the service last week, just before examinations began. It was a cruel case, and the whole class sympathized with him, but it was no use."

"But what had he done?"

"He was one of the best men in the class, and stood fair to go to the head in mathematics; but he was rather wild, and given to getting out after taps—I mean at night—so that he had a good many demerits on conduct. Well, the night before the board of visitors arrived, poor Mac had come to my room, and we were sitting talking over old times. It was against the rules, but a thing constantly done, and the officers wink at it, unless it is specially brought to their notice. Well, some one—I cannot say who—it must have been an outsider, for there is not a man in the whole Academy who would have done such a trick—went and reported him and me, and the officer of the day opened the door and found us smoking. It was a demerit for each of us. I could stand it, but Mac Diarmid had too many already to afford another. He has a hot temper, and he used some very bitter language about espionage. The result was, he was summarily dismissed. Poor fellow! The whole class liked him, with all his faults. He is a

wonderful rider and shot, and he can disarm our fencing-master any time."

"Is this Mac Diarmid a poor man?" asked Miss Brinton thoughtfully.

"No—far from it. His father left him, I believe, a very large fortune, acquired in the fur trade. But that does not console Mac. There are some things I am not at liberty to mention that made him long to graduate from here, but it was not to be."

The young lady sighed sympathetically.

"I am so sorry for the poor fellow. But you at least have passed with honor. How proud your mother must be of you. I wish I knew her. She must——"

For some reason the young lady hesitated, and her face grew red in the moonlight. She shivered and rose up.

"It is growing chilly, I think. I must find my father. He may be getting anxious. I'm afraid we have been led away by this beautiful river into staying too long, Mr. Armstrong. Shall we go back?"

"If you please," said the young officer promptly. Then, as they moved away up the steps, he said: "I feared this little hour was too bright to last. You know I go West to-morrow."

"I thought," said Miss Brinton innocently—"I thought all you gentlemen received a leave of absence."

"We do; but I must spend mine at home in the West."

Miss Brinton turned away her head slightly.

"I suppose you are right. But I thought that it was understood that you and Cornelius were to pay us a visit at the Beeches."

"I don't think I shall go there," said Armstrong quietly. "The danger is too great, and even a soldier does not court needless danger."

"Danger!" echoed the lady, with an accent of surprise. "To what, pray?"

"To me, from you," said Armstrong quietly, but very distinctly.

Miss Brinton gave a little start and a nervous laugh.

"From me, Mr. Armstrong? Why, how strangely you talk! You are joking, of course."

"I am not joking," said Armstrong calmly. "I know well the danger to me from your society, and I also know that if I visit the Beeches with Van Dyck I shall make a fool of myself."

The young lady was quite silent after this for some time, until they reached the summit of the path and came out at the edge of the Cavalry Plain. Then she suddenly said, *apropos* of nothing:

"I wish my father would not ask Cornelius Van Dyck to come. I don't like him at all."

"I'm sorry. Remember he and I are in the same company, and he is my senior."

"Is he?"

"Yes. And without his introduction I should never have known you, and so have missed the brightest days of my life."

Miss Brinton laughed a little.

"I never believe compliments, sir. You soldiers make them so easily."

"You shall not say that of me, Miss Brinton," said the young man gravely. "I may expose myself to your scorn for presumption, but never to your contempt for insincerity."

Miss Brinton said nothing, but she turned her head away again as they walked on.

"Van Dyck is a rich man's son," pursued the young officer, "and has been your neighbor for years. I am a poor man's son. The kindness of one man and the Military Academy have made me an officer, and—I hope—a gentleman."

Miss Brinton turned to him with a swift gesture. "I know it. No one can deny it, indeed. Mr. Armstrong, don't go on. I would not pain you for the world."

She looked remarkably sweet and sympathetic as she spoke.

"I know it," said he. "You are goodness itself. But I—I am ambitious; and I—if I go to the Beeches I may even—in short, Miss Brinton—you must understand me—you are rich and I am a poor soldier, with nothing but his sword to offer the woman he loves—yes, it's out. I did not mean to say it—I know you'll despise me, only don't misunderstand me, for Heaven's sake."

The young fellow rambled desperately on, his face very white and anxious in the moonlight.

What Juliet Brinton might have answered is difficult to say, but at that moment they ran, at a turn of the path, on another couple, a tall, heavy-built officer and a young lady, who immediately cried out:

"Why, there he is now, Cornelius; and bringing her back as safe as any well conducted cavalier should. Juliet, we must go back, or Uncle Joseph will be raging; and as for Aunt Isabel, she's doing that already. Mr. Armstrong, this cousin of mine has his orders to bring you with him to the Beeches to-morrow. Uncle Joseph has made up the party, and we're to take no denial."

"I fear, Miss Dashwood," said Armstrong in a constrained tone, "that I cannot accept your kind invitation. I ought to go home to see my parents in Illinois."

"Just as if a young soldier couldn't wait a week to please a lady," said Miss Dashwood saucily.

She was a very different looking girl from Juliet Brinton, slight, small and blonde, with a mobile face full of spirit and temper; and she had a peculiar impulsive, birdlike way about her that disarmed all opposition.

"Now, Mr. Armstrong, remember we won't take 'no'

for an answer. I've set my heart on a gallop with you across the old Brinton Manor, and when I set my heart on a thing, it's done. Cousin Cornelius here is too lazy to ride well, and then he's not gallant either, while they tell me you gentlemen from the Point are perfect cavaliers; and if there's anything I love, it's a good gallop."

"The prospect is very alluring, Miss Dashwood," said the young man quietly, "but I fear——"

Miss Dashwood interrupted him without ceremony by turning to Juliet. "Juliet, isn't he to come? Isn't he now?"

"I hope so," said Juliet Brinton, very softly.

"Mr. Armstrong, that settles it," said the pert little Dashwood, with prompt decision. "Now it's no use talking. I've been bothered enough with this clumsy cousin of mine, and I want you to show me Kosciusko's garden by moonlight. Cornelius, you take Juliet back to Uncle Joseph at once, sir. There's no more romance in you than a performing bear, if you *are* my cousin. Take her back. Aunt Isabel is looking for her all over, along with Major Pipes. Ta-ta! Come along, Mr. Armstrong."

Exactly how it was done, it was difficult to say. Armstrong seemed to himself to have no choice in the matter, while the rather clumsy youth who was characterized as Cornelius Van Dyck stood perfectly silent all the while. It was evident that Miss Dashwood was used to having her own way, and not at all particular about politeness in effecting it. Before any one could interpose an objection, the ladies had changed partners, and Miss Brinton was walking one way toward the Mess Hall, leaning on Van Dyck's arm, while Nettie Dashwood was half dragging Armstrong in the other, chattering volubly all the time.

"Isn't this fun, Mr. Armstrong?" she said in a low voice, half laughing, as soon as they were out of hearing of *the others*. "We've circumvented Aunt Isabel entirely,

and she has eyes as sharp as needles. That poor innocent Cornelius will get a mild scolding, but then he'll stand a good deal of that for Juliet's sake, and Aunt Isabel won't mind when she thinks Cornelius has been spooning with Juliet."

The young officer said nothing as he walked along, but he tugged at his moustache with a preoccupied air. His companion divined his thoughts with the lightning perception of a woman, and went straight at him. What would have been rude in some girls was only playful oddity with Nettie Dashwood. A desperate flirt on all occasions, she was really a good-natured soul, and she showed it now.

"You needn't tug at that moustache and look savage," she went on. "If you only knew what I've done for you to-night, you'd be down on your knees to me, if you had a spark of gratitude. I tell you it was fun. There was Aunt Isabel on the anxious bench, declaring that she saw you and Juliet go off together, and I declaring that it was Cornelius. If it had not been for a little cadet who took me out for a promenade, like a little darling as he was—and I own I treated him shamefully too—I might never have succeeded. But who should I meet outside but Cornelius! and the way I seized him and dropped that poor innocent little cadet—it *was* a shame, I own, but you know how I do those things. I *must* make my peace with that poor boy to-night, I declare. Well, then, the next thing was to find you and not excite Cornelius's suspicions—he's as jealous as Othello, you know. You saw how I did that—and now the question is, what do you say to me?"

The young man pressed her arm softly.

"You have been very, very kind. But it convinces me of one thing: I ought not to go to the Beeches. I cannot keep up this sort of thing long."

Nettie Dashwood *tossed her* head slightly.

"I didn't think *you* would show the white feather, sir. Bah! if *I* were a man I'd let no one come between me and *my* deserts."

Armstrong closed his lips with a slight frown.

"I don't know that I am afraid, but I don't care to enter on a course of deceit, if I must speak plain. Nay, don't take away your arm. I know you are my true friend. But just think a moment. Could I preserve my self-respect long if I had to deceive Judge Brinton in his own house? It must come out some time, and it could only end in pain for—for—her. I had better go away."

Nettie Dashwood laughed a little scornful laugh.

"You should have thought of that before, sir. You men are all alike. Pain to *her!* You flatter yourself too highly. She doesn't care an atom for you, any more than another."

"But I do for her, and you know it," said he in a low tone. "You spied my secret long ago."

"So I did, you poor fellow," she said in a mollified voice. Then she resumed with spirit, "You men are incomprehensible sometimes. When the fruit hangs before you there is always some scruple to prevent you plucking it. Many men would jump at your chance of spending a week in a country house with Juliet Brinton. I suppose you're afraid of Van Dyck. I don't wonder. He *is* a big fellow, and if he gets jealous, he might have his revenge on you, out on the plains. To be sure, Juliet hates him, and if ever she marries him, as Uncle Joseph wishes her to do, he'll make her miserable. But then that's nothing to you. You decline the task of saving her, and you're *prudent.*"

As she dropped one after another of her little stings, in a light, playful tone, she watched him keenly out of the corner of her eye; for Nettie Dashwood had not obtained her own way with men ever since she left school without

knowing how to manage them. They had traversed the whole length of the Cavalry Plain by this time, and were coming near the walk in front of the hotel. Here Armstrong hesitated.

"If I thought—if I dared to think——" he muttered.

She wheeled him round in her impetuous manner, and began to walk back to the steps leading down to Kosciusko's Garden.

"You'll come to the Beeches. Not a word more. It's settled," she said.

Armstrong drew a long sigh.

"I will," he answered.

Then they began to descend the steps leading to Kosciusko's Garden.

CHAPTER IV.

FORT NAPOLEON.

"I SAY the service is going to the devil, sir. It's been going to the devil a long while."

The speaker was a stout old officer, with broad shoulders and a hard, weather-beaten face, the last being something between mahogany and underdone roast beef in color. His hair was still nearly black, but his little moustache was snow white, stiff and bristling. Had he worn his full beard he would have looked twenty years older than he was, but this old officer was fully aware of that fact, and he shaved clean.

No one would ever have mistaken Adolphus C. Slaughter, Lieutenant Colonel 14th Cavalry and Brevet Major General U. S. A., for anything but an old soldier. Every turn of his head was imperious, and he carried his sixty years on a backbone as straight as an arrow. His gray eyes peered out from under bushy white brows with a savage expression that was partly real and partly assumed, while his square jaw and short stubby nose were those of a resolute, hard-headed fighter all over.

General Slaughter wore the most disreputable old uniform to be seen, even on the plains. His cap was generally new, but it was hard to tell the original color of the old sack coat he constantly wore, over a blue sailor's shirt and the trousers of a common soldier, thrust into big boots. He smoked a disreputable short pipe, and drank a good deal of "commissary," but no one ever saw him quite *drunk*.

His voice was peculiar, harsh and grating in its tones, and when he was "in a tantrum," as the officers called it—which he frequently was—it sounded like the bellowing of an angry bull. The chief point of difference between the two was that bulls don't swear, while General Slaughter was said to be able to outcurse any man in his regiment. When he was particularly savage with an offender, he used to begin in a low voice, with a manner of great softness, and wearing an engaging smile; but as he went on with his lecture, the bull would slowly come out at intervals, till General Slaughter invariably terminated by bellowing out a string of maledictions, enough to make a nervous man's hair rise.

The officers of the fort were gathered in the post-trader's store, taking a morning nip after stables.

The commanding officer, by virtue of his rank probably, sat on the top of a cracker-barrel, flanked by Dr. Slocum, the post surgeon, with his heavy mottled face and grizzled side whiskers. The men called Slocum a "Tartar," and he certainly was a good deal of a brute, but then an army surgeon is so used to suspecting "malingerers" in all his patients that he gets hard. The Doctor's nose betrayed him as a sworn ally of General Slaughter, which he was.

"Quite right, General," he growled in answer to Slaughter's remark. "The service isn't what it used to be in the Mexican war, sir. I remember those days—before your time, General—but the army's never been what it was then."

"I don't know about that, Doctor," put in a young fresh-faced man in the neat undress of an assistant surgeon. "It seems to me that our men do as much duty, and our officers fight as well, as they used to do under Scott."

"*Oh, yes; to hear the* boys talk one would think we

had a wonderful army, eh, General? You and I know better. Aha!"

And the two old fellows chuckled scornfully.

"There's Groutey; he can tell you whether it's what it used to be."

Captain Groutey executed a sarcastic grin, and his fiery red face shone out of the white curly hair that contrasted with it so forcibly, like the rising moon in a white fog.

"Boys always think they know a great deal," was his only comment.

"But of all the divils to know the whole thing, give me one of the Pointer pups, just joined," broke in a strong Irish accent at this juncture; and Captain Burke eyed his glass quizzically. He was a tall, handsome, reckless looking Celt, with a shock of black curls and a shining moustache, and his manners had a spice of barrack vulgarity that told of the man risen from the ranks.

His speech seemed to gratify Slaughter and most present, for the General grinned.

"Well, we manage to lick them into shape after a while," he said. "We shall have a new batch of those boys on very soon now. One coming to you, Burke, and another for Groutey. I hope you'll teach them a little real soldiering."

"Do you think that they are any harder to teach than one of your green civil appointments, just joined, General?" asked a quiet voice from the other end of the store.

Somehow or other Slaughter, Slocum, Burke, and Groutey made a sort of face simultaneously and were silent.

The speaker came into the group, a large, gaunt-looking man, with a heavy gray beard and a face furrowed with smallpox. For all his grim, ugly figure-head this man was evidently a gentleman, and the gold leaf on his shoulder showed him to be a major of cavalry.

"I hardly think it is becoming for officers, from whatever class they come, to sneer at the graduates of the Military Academy," he said. "You know that we all have to live together in harmony, and it does not seem fair to use such language in my presence because I happen to be the only graduate among you."

General Slaughter was off his cracker barrel in a moment, his sense of justice aroused.

"Gentlemen, Major Westbrooke is right. No more such discussions while I am commanding officer here. When I go out I'll bet you won't do it, for the Major will clap you in arrest. Eh! Major? Ha! ha!"

And the General bellowed his gigantic laugh as usual.

The only person who appeared to dissent from this settlement was Captain Groutey, whose fiery face grew more fiery as he buried it in his tumbler.

"I don't see why an officer should not be allowed to express an opinion, so long as it does not affect the action of his military superiors," he said. "I know I always have a lot of trouble in bringing my new lieutenants into training, and it makes no difference whether they are fresh from the Point or from civil life. One knows as little as the other, only he's more conceited."

"It's a pity you can't enforce your views on Congress," said Westbrooke with quiet irony. "They *might* abolish the Academy to please you."

"No chance of their doing anything so sensible," growled Groutey. "Too many Congressmen interested in sending boys there."

The little war of sharp sayings was interrupted here by the entrance of a bustling young fellow in big boots, a blue flannel suit, and a broad white hat, who came in like a regular gale of wind, waving a packet of letters and newspapers.

"*Hooroar, boys,*" he cried. "Just got in from San

Antonio, along with Colorado Charley and the mail. General, here's a letter for you, sir. Got it from headquarters. Catch, Burke; here, Groutey; Major Westbrooke, paper for you—no letter; Dr. Yunger, here she is—nice little hand she writes; Graham, Hallett, Kinsley, here you are. Now, boys, what do you say?"

"By Jove, Mark Meagher, we all say you're as welcome as the flowers in May," said old Dr. Slocum, unbending his grim features to a smile.

The room presented a different appearance to what it had a moment before. Then every one looked sullen and discontented, growling over imaginary troubles and ready to quarrel from moment to moment. Expatriated as it were from civilization, and thrown into each other's society without the power to escape therefrom, the officers of a post either like each other immensely or hate each other intensely. Which they do depends greatly on the influence of the commander of the post and the society he keeps. Fort Napoleon was known as a "hard-drinking" post, where ladies were almost unknown, and where the officers were always in some trouble.

The opening of the mail, however, was an event that for the time banished all disagreeable thoughts. Fort Napoleon was several hundred miles from a railroad, and mails were few and far between. The country, for many leagues round, was constantly roamed by war parties of Indians, and travelling was almost impossible, save with regular scouting parties of cavalry in strong force.

And yet no one seemed to have the slightest curiosity to know how this young man who had brought them the mail, probably at the peril of his life, had got there. He stood fanning himself with his broad white hat and smiling, as if he felt well pleased to be the messenger of good. There was no mark of the soldier about him, though he *carried two revolvers* in holsters behind his belt. He

looked free and independent, as if he offered and asked no favors from any one there.

Presently old Slaughter finished his reading and looked up briskly.

"Well, Mark, and how did you find Indians?"

"Pretty thick, General, but I've not been a 'special' on the plains for nothing. If Colorado Charley and I can't get on by daylight, we can always travel in the dark without being seen. We had a bit of a brush near the fort gate as we came in, with a couple of reds out on the lay for what they could pick up, but they skedaddled as soon as they found we meant business."

"I always said that those infernal newspaper men were like cats," growled Dr. Slocum, like an amiable bear. "But I've dissected cats in my time, and with all their nine lives I've seen 'em fetched at last. You'll come your hair-brained games once too often, young fellow, and all the skin-grafting of Paris won't give you a new scalp."

Mark Meagher laughed, as he slapped his boot with his whip. He was a long, thin young fellow, with a big nose, close-cropped red hair and a perpetual slight smile hovering on his lip, while his bright gray-green eyes roved restlessly from object to object. He seemed as if he was laughing at some one, though his words were perfectly polite.

"Never mind, Doctor. Mr. Lo hasn't got my hair yet, and it'll puzzle him to yank it off, if he *does* get the drop on me. Barber gave me the lunatic crop, down at San Antonio. Colorado Charley swears it's not fair. 'Mr. Meagur,' he said to me when we rode out, 'I'm durned ef I'd like to be caught by the reds riding with a galoot like you. They'd call it foul play. I allers shakes my scalp at 'em to rile 'em, but they'll think you're skeered on 'em.' You know Charley's got a mane like a mustang, and I can't get him to take it off."

Captain Groutey looked up from his letter at this mo-

ment and folded it carefully. Then he observed sarcastically:

"You needn't be afraid but what any Indian buck that catches *you* will be able to get that bricktop of yours off. I've known them get so mad at a bald-headed man that they staked him out and lighted a nice little fire on the pit of his stomach, to start the hair growing."

Mark Meagher laughed again.

"First catch your hare, Groutey, as Mrs. Glass says. The *Tabard* correspondents always manage to get through alive. There was MacDonald of ours got into Khiva ahead of the Russian columns, when a whole pulk of Cossacks was chasing him to bring him back. Mauley's crossed Africa where British naval officers couldn't get through, and I'll bet on Mark Meagher to get into any Indian camp on the plains and out again with a whole skin. I've done it once, and I can do it again."

Here Captain Burke jumped up, waving his letter.

"True for ye, Meagher, and it's an Irishman that'll back ye. Gentlemen, it's my treat. John Barker, ye unhung vagabond, get out all the poison ye've got. Bedad, boys, I've good news come for me. Me uncle in Ireland's left me a snug little twenty thousand dollars, and me application for leave's goin' in to-morrow. Come, Barker, trot out the bottles."

No one seemed to be loth to accept the invitation, for idle men are the same all over the world, and the bar was soon surrounded by the officers of the post.

"Come, Mark, name your poison," sang out Burke. "It's not an Irishman that'll go back on his bottle."

"No use, Burke. I never touch it," was the reply. "Go ahead, all the rest of you."

Major Westbrooke, who was sitting at the end of the store, buried in his paper, looked up when invited to join, *and briefly said:*

"Excuse me. Not this morning."

Burke did not press the question, and presently it resulted that Westbrooke and Mark Meagher were apart from the rest. The "special" for the New York *Tabard* walked thoughtfully to the window, and stood there looking out, slapping his boot with his whip.

A broad dusty plain, with every blade of grass baked into brown; a row of low adobe buildings with thatched roofs stretching around it; a sentry pacing up and down beside a lofty flagstaff, from which the colors hung lazily; distant clouds of dust before the long line of cavalry stables at the opposite side of the square; outside of all, glimpses of a desolate plain and the glitter of weapons at the guardhouse by the entrance: there was Fort Napoleon.

"I wish all of your tribe were as cool as you, Meagher," said a low voice at the correspondent's elbow. "They usually beat our officers at drinking, and that is needless. What are you up for?"

"There's trouble coming, Major, and the *Tabard* has the news in advance. They're going to move Black Horn's band on a reservation, and the Twelfth will get orders to move two battalions to Dakota inside of a week. I passed the officer carrying the despatches, coming out of San Antonio."

Major Westbrooke flushed a little, and his eyes glittered.

"Who goes?"

"Your battalion and Groutey's. You're to join General St. Aure at Marengo, and go on a long expedition. There's a survey to be run for a new road through the heart of the buffalo range, and your battalion, with one of the Thirteenth Cavalry and two companies of the Forty-fifth Infantry, are to form the escort."

"By Heavens, I'm glad of it!" said the Major heartily. "St. Aure's *a splendid officer*, and we'll see some fun. I

remember him at the Academy, long ago. I had come back on a visit from the plains, and he was a young plebe. They used to call him 'Pug'—he had so many fights. I haven't seen him now since Lee's surrender. He was the handsomest general officer I ever saw then. Ah, Mark, time makes changes. Here am I, ten years longer in the service than he, and a major low down on the list, while he stands first for the next colonelcy. But, by Heavens, sir, St. Aure deserves every step he ever won, and I grudge him nothing—only—it does seem hard for me at times."

Mark Meagher nodded absently. He was used to hearing the growls of officers disappointed in life, and they made small impression on him. A newspaper correspondent at a frontier fort is apt to become the recipient of all sorts of confidences, but Mark had a keen scent for news and a keen discrimination for what was only personal feeling.

Their conference was broken up by the sound of the bugle blowing the buglers' assembly, and Groutey tore himself away from the bar, where he had been diligently coloring his fiery face to a deep purple hue, and wended his way, with slow and solemn steps, to his quarters, to put on his uniform, as it was his turn for officer of the day.

Little squads of men in full dress, carrying carbine and sabre, began to turn out of the adobe barracks round the square, and presently the sergeant major rode past, erect, alert and soldierly, while the buglers began to form on horseback in the middle of the parade ground.

"What! Are they going to have mounted guard-mount?" asked the correspondent in a tone of surprise.

"Yes. It's one of Slaughter's pet hobbies. There's a scouting party arranged for to-day, and they are to form with the guard. Young Hallett is to take them out. Oh, by the by, do you know who's assigned to us from the new *class this year?*"

"Two; a young fellow from Illinois called Armstrong, and a Connecticut lad—Greene, I think. Armstrong goes to Groutey's company, with Van Dyck for first lieutenant, and young Greene comes under Burke."

"I pity Armstrong," said Westbrooke smiling grimly. "That Groutey is the most—but never mind. Come to my quarters and have a pipe, Mark."

"Thanks, major; I never smoke. It spoils the nerve and eyesight, and I want all mine to get out to-night."

"Good Heavens, Mark! You're surely not going back alone again!"

"Colorado Charley goes with me, along with his partner, Major. I'm going through to Fort Marengo before I've done. I have to make a report to the *Tabard* on the condition of the tribes between this department and Dakota. There's something up among them, and I'm going to find out what it is, or leave my bones on the plains."

"Are you at liberty to tell anything?" said the Major in a low tone.

"To you this much. There's some medicine man, or prophet, or what not, abroad among the tribes trying to stir them up to a general revolt. They've been leaving the northern agencies and going off to hunt in suspicious numbers; and all the trails point toward the headwaters of the Yellowstone. There's some white man into the movement besides, and I have my suspicions that it's a priest."

"A priest!" echoed Westbrooke incredulously.

"Yes. You know those Jesuit missionaries go anywhere among the tribes in safety. Indians have been heard talking about some black father in the agencies, and I've come to the conclusion that there's going to be a grand council somewhere in the northern Buffalo Range. I'm going to attend that council."

Major Westbrooke stared in blank amazement at the "*special.*"

"Why, there's hardly an officer in the army would dare to think of such a scheme," he said at last. "What sort of men are you correspondents?"

"Well, Major, we take our orders, and we put them through if we can. The report of that council will be worth a good many dollars to the *Tabard*. No one else will have it."

The Major stared at Mark as if he thought him a lunatic, then turned away, shaking his head, just as the buglers began to blow the "Assembly of Guard."

CHAPTER V.

JOHN LOGAN MAC DIARMID.

IT was a hot, sultry night in New York in the middle of June, and Fifth avenue was silent and deserted. The moon was at the full, and shone down on the crowded tenement quarters of the city, where men, women, and children lay scattered over the sidewalks, gasping for breath in the intense heat. Mrs. Flaherty's boarders, down in Avenue B, were sitting on the roof trying to get cool, the men smoking, the ladies fanning themselves. Furtive figures crept about among the bushes of the Ramble in Central Park, seeking some place safe from the eyes of the night patrolmen on the watch for tramps. Panting dogs lay in the carriage ways in the thickest dust they could find, feeling safe from disturbance on such a night. Hardly a hackman was abroad, and those who were out drove slowly, their horses exhausted with the heat. On the river sloops and schooners lay at anchor in midstream, the black, oily water gurgling past their bows as they swung head to tide. The only cool place was found on the docks, where hundreds of people from the neighboring tenement houses lay all night, enjoying the sleep which was to furnish them with strength to get through the next day. It was a specimen "scorcher," after a long, hot, dry season, never so distressing as in New York city, where the crowds of London are transferred for a few weeks to the atmosphere of Calcutta or Cairo, and where tropical laziness has not yet supplanted Northern energy and greed of gold.

In the country it was still delicious; at West Point

they were dancing and flirting away. But through the midst of the silent moonlit landscape, winding round sharp rocks and tearing over long stretches of desolate black marsh, a screeching and snorting monster of steel and fire swept toward the city—the midnight express from Albany. It whirled past Spuyten-Duyvl creek, dashed through Haarlem Bridge, shrieking dismally; and then plunged into the tunnel with a snort and a whistle, as if calling to its iron comrades to welcome it home, till it finally drew up with a grand clanging of bells, and rumbled slowly into the Grand Central Depot.

There was hardly any one in the depot. A single hack, horse and man both asleep, stood in front of the Hudson River rooms. A few passengers left the cars and stumbled slowly up the paved walk leading to the street, but two of them walked briskly on in spite of the heat. They were Mac Diarmid and Evan Roy.

The short, fiery-bearded Highlander—so strangely out of place in prosaic New York, with his high-flown notions about the blood of the Mac Diarmids—strode along easily enough, keeping step with his tall companion without trouble. One might notice now that his shoulders were enormously broad, and that he had an appearance of great personal strength in spite of his short stature.

Mac Diarmid looked moody and desperate as ever, and pressed on in silence. As he passed the slumbering hackman the man awoke, hearing steps, and accosted him.

"Cab, sir? cab?"

"No, no! Go to the devil! No!" said the young man savagely. "I can walk to Fifth avenue, can't I?"

The cabman looked astonished at the rude repulse, but consoled himself by capturing a stout old gentleman from the country, who wanted to be driven to the Metropolitan.

Mac Diarmid and his companion turned off into the si-

lent streets—for it was now nearly half past two—and proceeded to Lexington Avenue, up which they went a little way, stopping at a large brown-stone-front house, the only one in the whole street which appeared to be occupied; for a light burned in the hall.

They had hardly rung the bell when a quick, light step sounded in the passage, and a little thin old man, with white hair, opened the door, and said in a low voice:

"Entrez, Monsieur, mon fils. Entrez, notre chef. On vous attend longtemps? Madame se met a prier toujours pour la santé des chef."

"How *is* my mother, Baptiste Conneau?" asked Mac Diarmid in the same language, as he softly entered the hall, followed by Evan Roy.

"Madame is as usual," replied the old man, with a slight shrug. "Mademoiselle continues to devote herself to the teachings of Monsieur De Launay, but Madame absolutely refuses to civilize."

Mac Diarmid burst into a bitter laugh.

"Civilize! She is right, Baptiste. What good has all the civilization of this cursed country done me or mine? Civilization! It is a lie, a cheat, a mask for cowards and traitors to sneak behind, that they may stab their betters from its shelter. Give me barbarism, if this is civilization."

The old man made no remark at this tirade. He merely bowed obsequiously, and waved his hand toward the door of a parlor close by. Evan Roy shrugged his shoulders and followed Mac Diarmid in silence. They entered a long lofty parlor, handsomely furnished, but with a strange air of barbaric magnificence in certain portions thereof. There was a trophy of weapons of all nations above the mantelpiece, flanked by two fine cattle pieces of Troyon, and over the white limbs of a marble Psyche was draped the spotted skin of a tiger-cat. Antelope and deer

heads projected from the walls, side by side with bronze brackets upholding rare Japanese vases; and right in the midst of the crimson and gold cloth of a centre table lay a rifle and a pair of revolvers, with empty cartridge cases beside them, and flanked by a tray with decanters and glasses.

As soon as Mac Diarmid entered the room, his glance settled on the decanters. He turned and slapped old Baptiste on the shoulder with a loud laugh.

"Hurrah, Baptiste! There is something in civilization after all. It gives us whiskey to drown cares! Bring more bottles, old man—more! Call my mother! We'll drink to civilization!"

And he clutched one of the decanters and waved it over his head with a strange wild yell that echoed through the house like something unearthly.

"Here I stand," he continued in the same wild tone—"John Logan Mac Diarmid, the son of two lines of chiefs, with a fortune to back me, and I swear I'm going to get so drunk to-night that old civilization shall laugh for glee. Curse the Academy! Curse the army! Who cares for the blue-coated martinets? I'm a better soldier than any in the class, and by Heavens, they shall see that John Logan Mac Diarmid wants no sign manual of a white-livered President to give him license to fight for his race! Drink, Evan Roy! drink, I say!"

He was just raising the decanter to his lips without more ceremony, when Evan Roy suddenly seized him from behind and pinioned both arms.

"Tak the bottle, Baptiste," said the Scot from between his clenched teeth. "Tak it, ye fule."

The next minute the two men, who had come into the city as sworn friends, were engaged in a furious struggle. Mac Diarmid strove to wrench himself free, or, *failing that*, to bend over and throw Evan Roy over his

head, but it became evident in a moment that the Scot was the stronger of the two, besides being a skilful wrestler. He held his grip like a vice, with one knee slightly raised, so as to press into the back of Mac Diarmid, and allowed the other to drag him across the room, cursing in a manner horrible to hear. Little Baptiste, dexterously enough, seized the decanter as Mac Diarmid dropped it, and bore it off in triumph to a large iron safe at the end of the room, fashioned into the likeness of a mahogany side-board. Deftly, and as if used to rapid work, the old man slipped in the bottles, slammed the door, turned the key and put it in his pocket, heedless of the struggle going on behind him.

Then he turned and squeaked out:

"Laissez lui, Monsieur Rouge. Je l'ai caché!"

With that, Evan Roy suddenly dug his knee into Mac Diarmid's back, gave him a tremendous wrench, and threw him flat on his back with a concussion that shook the whole house, then stood looking down at him, while Baptiste fled the room as silently as a spirit.

For a moment there was a hush after the late furious struggle. Mac Diarmid lay looking stupidly up at the ceiling, for the shock had jarred his whole system, while Evan Roy was breathing heavily. Then the features of the fallen man contracted into a frown, his eyes glared wildly, and he leaped up from the ground by a contraction of the muscles of the back, with a motion that told of the practised gymnast.

He cursed no more, but his face was pale as ashes, as he rushed at the table on which the weapons lay. Evan Roy, watchful as a cat, was there before him, and with a single swift motion swept them off and sent them flying into a corner of the room. Mac Diarmid turned on him, livid with rage. Evan allowed the other to seize him round the waist, when he suddenly clutched the young

man's long black hair in his brawny left hand and caught him by the throat with his right, pressing his thumb into the larynx in a manner to produce intense pain and strangulation. The effect was like lightning. Mac Diarmid let go his hold with a strangled gurgle, and Evan bore him back, almost without resistance, over his knee and flat on the floor once more, when he knelt beside him, still holding his grip, and said sternly in the broad Scotch he used when excited:

"D'ye yield, or shall we call in the bailie's men and pit ye in airns like the daft deil ye are?"

The fallen man's face changed, and his black eyes quailed before the gleaming gray-blue orbs of the strong Scot, while he made an inarticulate whining sound. In a moment Evan Roy had released him, and stood up beside him, quiet and watchful as ever.

Mac Diarmid rose slowly and painfully, breathing hard, and went and sat down on one of the sofas in the room. He was evidently conquered for the time. Evan Roy watched him a moment with a look of thoughtful scrutiny, and then went and sat down beside him. The Highlander's manner had changed to one of great tenderness, and he spoke in Gaelic instead of English.

"The young eagle counts it no shame to be overcome of the old eagle, who would give his heart's blood, drop by drop, for the safety of his young. Is the Mac Diarmid angry with his foster father, who first taught him to handle the claymore and the rifle? See! The old eagle has conquered the young one: that is just. Now he offers him his blood. Take it."

The stalwart Highlander threw back his coat, and drew out a short dirk, which he handed to Mac Diarmid.

For a moment the fingers of the dark youth closed over the weapon, and he turned and looked at Evan.

The Scot met his gaze calmly and steadily.

"Strike," he said. "It is the right of the chief to kill his henchman."

John Logan Mac Diarmid rose to his feet, and stood for a moment trembling. Then he suddenly flung the knife from him to the other end of the room and turned abruptly away.

"I yield to no man," he said sullenly. "But you are not a man; you are my old master. Give me some whiskey, Evan. I'll do no harm."

"Ye'll get nae whuskey to-night, lad," said the Scot, jumping up and speaking in his ordinary abrupt manner and dialect. "Yer father's race can trink and keep their senses, but ye're a' the mither the nicht, and her race can-no' trink like shentlemen."

"But I'll promise you faithfully, Evan, to drink no more than is good for me," said the young man with sudden humility. "I tell you I *must* have some whiskey to-night."

"Yes; I know it, lad. That's the way Grey Eagle used to peg of your father, when he was trader at the great Fort. He would have sold all he had, wives, daughters, and all, town to his last horse and knife, to get enough whuskey to mak himself into a prute peast. Where is Grey Eagle now, he that was the wise medicine-chief of the Echipetahs? He tied like a tog in his kennel, and none to pity him; and his daughter, that was the pride of her tribe and the lawful wedded wife of the Mac Diarmid, what is she now?"

"She is my mother," said Mac Diarmid fiercely. "Who dare say a word against her? My father! Ha! you are so proud of your white blood you think my mother's race is nothing. I tell you, Evan Roy, this house, these lands, this wealth, all come from my mother's race. My father sold them poison, and they gave him wealth. A barrel of whiskey sold for a hundred robes, and he whom you call a

chief and the head of a clan became a trader, a cheating pedlar, to gain gold. I tell you, this house is mine by my mother's side, and when the curse of my race is on me, I *must* drink. *Baptiste, ici! où diable vas tu, sacré petit coquin? Vite! Apporte moi a boire!*"

He turned away from Evan Roy as he spoke, shouting through the silent house like a maniac. No one answered him, but a quick, light step was heard, and a tall, thin gentleman, dressed in the black cassock of a Roman Catholic priest, entered the room. His dark iron-gray hair was cut close to his head, and his face was clean shaven. He advanced with an expression of perfect kindness and composure on his thin, ascetic features, as if nothing extraordinary had happened; and something in his manner appeared to quell the lately furious young man.

"Welcome, my son," said the priest in low, smooth tones. "I heard from Baptiste that you had arrived, and I sent the old man to his much needed repose. Kneel, my son, kneel. We must not forget the blessed traditions of the Church in these days of blind infidelity. That is right."

The young chief, with the strangely romantic lineage and wild temper, seemed to be totally quelled for the moment before the authority of the priest. He sank submissively on his knees, while his spiritual father extended his hands above his head, and slowly pronounced a long Latin benediction.

Evan Roy sat watching the whole proceeding with a strange expression, compounded of reluctant admiration and keen, half-amused criticism. The priest was evidently a shrewd manager, for the stamp of a powerful intellect was on his high, narrow forehead and cold gray eyes, contradicting the sweet benevolence of his smile. He made his blessing unnecessarily slow and prolix, but all the while he was watching Mac Diarmid furtively, through his half-closed eyes, keeping the young man under the spell of

early habits and acquired ascendency. Then he suddenly ceased, and raised him up.

"It is well, my son," he said in French, which seemed to be the common language of that house. "Now we can speak together. Enter, Eulalie. Your brother is longing to embrace you."

Things were well managed in this remarkable house. At the signal, a rustle of silk was heard, and a young girl entered the room from the hall, where she and the priest had been hiding, in all probability, ever since the beginning of the struggle.

Mac Diarmid's countenance softened in an instant: no man could have resisted the looks of this girl. A small, slight creature, with shining black hair and great, lustrous eyes, the stamp of her mixed race, much plainer than in her brother, did not prevent her from being almost beautiful. The roundness of the face and prominence of the cheekbones only made her look childish for her years, while the whiteness of her even teeth made one forget that her mouth was not as small as the strict rules of Greek beauty require. She was above all things brilliant, flashing and piquant, an impression heightened by her dress. By a curious caprice, it was semi-savage in form, but wholly civilized in material—velvet and silk, with a bright scarlet and gold band around the head, crowned with a plume. There was no mistaking the Indian blood in Eulalie Mac Diarmid, but it was tempered by the luxuries of civilization.

"Mon frère!" she said softly, as she ran into his arms. "Que je te vois enfin."

Mac Diarmid embraced her very tenderly, and then held her off a moment, while he regarded her with a sad look, very different from his previous wild ravings.

"Harotach-tche, daughter of the morning," he said in slow, broken tones, "it is all over, my sister. Logan will

never ride before the white warriors as a chief. They have disgraced thy brother, and his hope for his mother's race has set in the night. We must flee this place. We were wrong to leave the tent of skins for the house of stones. The white blood and the red will not mix: they war in both of us to-night, my sister. Let us go hence and return to the lodges of our kindred. There are no liars there."

Eulalie—or Harotach-tche (Morning), as her brother called her—drew away from him and crossed her hands on her bosom with the quiet docility habitual to the Indian woman.

"Thou art a chief of the Echipetah," she said. "The women follow the warriors. I am ready."

"It is enough, my children," said the priest at this juncture. "The decision is wise, and we will go. Our friend Evan Roy can take care of your interests here while we are gone. It is well that the tribe should know their young chief, who shall yet bring them under the dominion of the true Church."

Mac Diarmid's face cleared instantly, but Evan Roy here interrupted them, in precise but labored French.

"You forget that Evan Roy follows his chief wherever he goes, Father de Launay. You talk of blood between you, as if the Gael and the Nadowessiouc were not the same people. In the chief, this is not surprising, Father; but in you, who are a man of erudition, and a philologist like myself, there should be more knowledge."

Father de Launay smiled, as if a little amused.

"My good Evan," he said in English, "you are on your theories again."

"Theories or no, it's a truth," said Evan, turning red. "Glowering is no gainsaying, Maister de Launay. Ye ken weel that the title o' the chief in his ain tribe is Wrath Felutah, or the Lord of Lords; and whilk is that, Maister de Launay, I'd hae ye to tell me, put the same as

the Gaelic and the Cymry, Ard-Fhlath, a wee corrupted? Mon, I can pruve it to ye py the rules of philology that the ret man of the plains and the Hieland chief are the same pluid to the heart's core. Dinna they baith despise preeks and lift cattle, Maister de Launay? Answer me that, I say!"

It was the first time during the evening that Evan Roy had exhibited any temper, and now he was obviously excited over his abstract question of philology. Father de Launay smiled and said:

"We'll admit it all, Evan; but nevertheless, you must see that a property like this cannot take care of itself. Mr. Mac Diarmid left too much money in real estate in this city alone to allow it to go to ruin. If the young chief goes to the plains, who will see that he is not cheated while he is gone?"

"Baptiste maun do it; I *winna*," said Evan decidedly. "Nay; I was born teaf on that side of my head; sae ye maun save yer preath for the parritch that needs cooling. We hae siller enow; and he that has siller in his purse may want a head on his shoulders. If ta chief gangs, she'll no pe ganging alane, but Evan Roy will gang wi' her at the head of her tail."

There was something so comical in the close of his speech that the situation was changed in a moment; for Eulalie Mac Diarmid burst into a peal of laughter like a chime of silver bells, and even Mac Diarmid smiled. Evan Roy flushed scarlet with anger.

"Folly is a ponny tog, put a pad ane, Miss Eulalie, and it's no pecoming in ye to pe girnin' at yer faither's kinsman that nursed ye on his knee when ye were a wee bit bairnie. I'll hae ye to ken that a Hieland chief suld nefer mofe without his *tail*—to wit, his henchman, and his target man, and his gun-bearer, and a gillie or twa. Pe sure Evan Roy winna gife up his place as the henchman."

The Highlander turned away in manifest displeasure, to find two soft arms round his neck, while the girl spoke in broken English :

" You vill not be angry with Eulalie, dear old Evan. She do not mean harm."

The henchman was mollified at once, but he still sulked a little, being probably by no means averse to the petting the girl bestowed on him ; and peace was soon restored.

Then said Father de Launay :

" Come, my children. It is time that our young chief should see his mother. You know she will not come forth from her own place. Let us go."

They left the room in silence, a hush seeming to come over the spirits of all. The halls and stairways were large and handsome, the walls brilliantly but extravagantly frescoed, with the same mingling of civilization and barbarism noticeable in the large parlor. The colors were bright and gaudy, both on wall and carpet ; but all the glare did not look vulgar so much as wild. The same profusion of furs and brilliant skins of panther and tiger-cat in the form of rugs was noticeable, and in spite of the extreme heat some one had lighted the gas all through the house.

They mounted three stories, when they heard a dull, monotonous, booming sound through a closed door. Father de Launay put his finger on his lips, and they listened.

The thumping of a tambourine and a crooning song became distinct, and they came from within the room before them.

" She is singing the chief's song," whispered Mac Diarmid. " It is for me. Stay here."

And he opened the door without more ceremony.

The tambourine and the crooning song never ceased, but the door closed behind him and left the rest of the *party* in the passage outside.

CHAPTER VI.

MADAM LACY.

"I THINK," said Madam Lacy oracularly, "that in these levelling times, when no respect is paid to family, however distinguished, young girls of position and fortune cannot be too cautious how they allow the acquaintance of young men to approach familiarity. I do *not* agree with Joseph in his principles, my dear. I think that politics are the ruin of the old families, since the immigration of so many foreigners; and I wonder at his permitting such things."

"Oh, well, Aunty, you know the world must go round, whether the old families exist or not," said Nettie Dashwood coolly. "We have no titles in this country, and I'm glad of it, or where should I be? After all, Grandpa Brinton began life as a counter——"

"Silence, miss!" broke in the old lady with the sharpest inflection of which her voice was capable. "Mr. Brinton belonged to a most excellent family in the old country, or he would never have married into the Van Amstels. Circumstances compelled him to enter trade, where he was successful, as true gentlemen always are when they bend their energies to a purpose. When his son Joseph married my sister Juliet, not all his fortune would have tempted us had not his family been good. I am shocked to hear a daughter of Eveline Lacy expressing such frightful sentiments."

"Yes, Aunty," said the incorrigible Nettie; "and poor mamma was so much opposed to them that she actually married an *Irishman*."

Madam Lacy turned pink to the roots of her white hair, and her thin high-featured face glowed with indignation.

"Nettie Dashwood," she said, "it ill becomes you, who are dependent——"

"On Uncle Joseph's bounty, you mean to say," said Nettie, as Madam Lacy paused an instant; "to answer you. Well, Aunty, tastes differ; and I'm prouder of my Irish father, if he *was* a poor artist, than of all your clod-pated Vans and Des with the blood of some old chief—burglar and murderer—in their veins, and the brains of a calf, like my worthy cousin Cornelius. *My* father had genius."

Madam Lacy gave a sniff of disdain.

"And all his genius brought him to his grave in a cheap coffin and his wife and child to *beg*," said she with bitter emphasis.

It was Nettie's turn to crimson now, and her blue eyes flashed.

"Not from *you*, Aunt Isabel—not from *you*. I thank God for *that*, at least."

The old lady cleared up immediately; for she had won her little triumph by irritating her niece, which, we must confess, the saucy minx deserved for her impudence. Miss —more commonly called Madam—Lacy, the rich and vinegary spinster sister-in-law of Judge Brinton, was at constant war with Nettie, and as constantly making it up. The cause of their present tiff will explain itself in time.

"You might do worse, Nettie, than to ask of your dead mother's sister," said Miss Lacy quietly. "You are a saucy and disrespectful girl very often, but you have the blood of the Lacys in your veins, which, however you may despise it, gives you all the spirit you have. No more, my dear—no more. Hush! I mean it!"

And somehow or other saucy Nettie did not answer, but turned away, with something very like a flounce, to

the window, while the old lady calmly pursued her crochet work with a faint smile on her firm mouth.

They were very much alike, aunt and niece. Slight, frail, nervous women both, with sharp, clear-cut features full of keen wit and determination. It was a saying at the Beeches that "Miss Nettie bossed the house, but Madam Lacy bossed Miss Nettie." It was a fact that the imperious little witch, who ruled every one else, was often worsted in her contests with her elder relative, and had to yield, unless she could gain her ends by stratagem.

Madam Lacy—as she had for years been called by a sort of brevet title—sat in a great Spanish armchair, cool and ample, telling of its Central American home by its curious construction. As she lifted her eyes from her work, they strayed over the tiled floor of the great cool drawing-room of the Beeches, out on the veranda and the broad stretch of the Hudson below, and paused a moment on the trim little figure of Nettie, in her blue riding habit and plumed cap, as she stood at the window, twisting her whip angrily between her hands.

As if to close any chance of a renewal of the contest, they were interrupted at this moment by the entrance of Judge Brinton, silver-haired and pompous as ever, while the sound of voices in the hall outside indicated the arrival of others.

"Well, my dear," said the Judge in his usual tones of mellifluous dignity, "you will have a delightful day for your little excursion. The thunder shower of last night has left us with a fine breeze from the north-east, and I have observed for many years that a north-east breeze in summer means settled cool weather for at least twelve hours."

"I hope you understand, Joseph," said Madam Lacy, icily, "that I disapprove of this excursion entirely, and that I consider it very imprudent on your part to allow

this young man, whom nobody knows, to go out riding with *my nieces.*"

The Judge looked shocked, and glanced apprehensively behind him into the hall.

"Hush, Isabel, for Heaven's sake! He is going away to-morrow, and you know we cannot——"

He approached and whispered the rest low.

"We cannot give Cornelius his opportunity to propose, now that his friend is here, without being polite to the young man. I have cautioned him. Don't be uneasy."

Madam Lacy pursed her lips and shook her head, but said no more, for at that moment Van Dyck and Armstrong, both in civil attire, came into the room.

"Morning, Aunt Isabel. Morning, Net," said the heavy Cornelius in his usual brusque manner. His lumpish features and round face, with the mangy little moustache and muddy complexion, wore an expression half sulky, half contemptuous. Young Armstrong, with his eager, enthusiastic face, bent before Madam Lacy with extreme and unaffected humility, for he was always reverential to old people; and even prejudiced Madam Lacy unbent a little in answer to his inquiries after her health.

"Pretty well, thank you, Mr. Armstrong. I am rather a frail creature at the best. I hear you are going to the plains to-morrow. Is this really your last day in these parts?"

"It is indeed, madam," said the young man with a slight sigh. "I am anxious to see my parents on the way, so I leave a week before Van Dyck."

Madam Lacy raised her eyebrows in languid surprise, and softly said:

"Indeed! Is it possible you have not seen them since you graduated?"

Armstrong flushed up. It was a home thrust.

"I own that I ought not to have done it," he said in a

low tone; "but my visit here has been so pleasant, that I have allowed time to slip by."

Madam Lacy glanced round the room. Van Dyck and Nettie were at the window, both looking sulky, and the Judge was walking up and down, absorbed in the contemplation of his own dignity.

"Young men should never forget their parents," said the old lady severely, "especially when the cause of their forgetfulness is a foolish affair that can never come to anything but harm."

This old lady, when it served her purpose, could be as merciless as Queen Elizabeth. Armstrong flushed still deeper, but his face changed from humility to firmness.

"Thank you, madam," he said in a constrained tone. "One cannot be sure of everything in this world. I cannot think that harm is *sure* to come of any of my actions, unless destiny wills it."

Again Madam Lacy assaulted him in the direct and positively rude way in which some very high-bred ladies indulge when they please.

"Yes, sir. I know that you are aspiring. I saw that the day I first met you. You think you will be a general some day, do you not?"

Armstrong fronted her squarely.

"I do, madam, if I live."

"Do you, really? Well, I suppose you will, if you don't allow folly to run away with you, *now*. I wish you well, but remember, till you *are* a general, you are no match for a lady of fortune. That is all."

Further conversation was cut off by the entrance of Juliet Brinton, cool as ever, her black hair smoothly coiled on her head, and surmounted by a stovepipe hat of the regulation ugliness. Miss Brinton was no sylph, but a healthy, placid, whole-souled girl, tall for a woman, with

hands and feet large and shapely, a fine bust and a fine appetite. She was what is called a *good* girl, well educated and docile to her father. How much he knew of her inner character time will tell. Juliet's black riding habit was close and clinging in all the useful ugliness of the fashionable style, and she contrasted strongly in her severe simplicity of appearance with restless, impulsive little Nettie, whose blue, corded with white, and her white-plumed cap, smacked a little of the circus. But then Nettie never heeded comments of this sort, even from Aunt Isabel. "It's *pretty:* it becomes *me,* and I shall *wear it,*" she said, in answer; and she did wear it in the country, to the scandal of all the Lacy family, who had colonized the neighborhood two hundred years since, and to whom Nettie was a sore trial as a relative.

Miss Brinton saluted Armstrong with the same cool placidity which she displayed to all her male acquaintances, and not a shade of difference could be detected in her manner toward Van Dyck, who turned from the window to greet her with unconcealed eagerness.

The Judge roused himself from the revery in which he had seemingly been buried, at the entrance of his daughter.

"Just in time, Juliet, my love. I see James is bringing round the horses. Now don't ride too fast. It is only five miles to the old Manor House, and you can take your time over it. Cornelius, remember, I entrust your cousin Juliet to *your* care. Nettie, the little madcap, never comes to harm; and she and Mr. Armstrong are sure to come home safe. Come, girls, I don't wish to hurry you, but remember that it is now four o'clock, and the sun sets at half past seven. The sooner you are out, the better."

The party broke up without more ado, by no means with reluctance. Madam Lacy refused to look up from her work as they saluted her. The only stranger in the

party was Armstrong, and about him the old lady did not seem to care; while the others, being relatives, were used to her ways.

Outside the gate were waiting the horses. It was not surprising that Van Dyck and the two girls were well mounted, coming as they did from wealthy homes, but Judge Brinton looked with a little amazement at Armstrong's animal.

"Why, Armstrong," he said in his patronizing way, "I did not know you had such a horse as that. He looks as if he were a thoroughbred."

"He is, Judge," said the young man quietly.

The Judge was too well bred to ask the question he wished, but Armstrong saved him the trouble by his simple directness.

"He is a present to me from an old friend, who has more money than happiness, Judge," he said. "His name is Mac Diarmid."

"Eh, what? Not the son of old Mac Diarmid & Co., who used to be with the Hudson's Bay Fur Company?" asked the Judge eagerly. "Do you know that young man?"

"We were cadets together," said Armstrong.

"Dear, dear, now!" muttered the Judge. "This is very extraordinary, very! Well, good afternoon, sir. Take care of your charge."

And the Judge drew back. Van Dyck and the girls were already half way down the avenue; for Armstrong, unwilling to be rude to his host, had not yet mounted. Now he bowed, sprang into the saddle without touching the stirrup, and his bright bay bounded off eagerly after the rest. The Judge reëntered the house and went straight to his sister-in-law.

"Isabel," he said in a tone of interest, "do you know that young man is intimate with the owner of the very house they are going to visit to-day?"

"What house? You mean those foreign-looking people who bought of you? Spanish, aren't they?"

"No, no. The father made a heap of money in the fur trade, and they said he married some Indian woman——"

"A squaw!" echoed Madam Lacy, horrified. "Good gracious, Joseph, we can't associate with half-breeds. Why, I was thinking of leaving my card at the house, and now you've gone and allowed your daughter to pay a visit there!"

"No, no, my dear sister. The house is shut up," said the Judge, soothingly. "There's no one there; or was not, a few days ago. The Mac Diarmids are away in Europe, travelling. You must remember that they are a good deal richer than we are."

"Well," said Madam Lacy obstinately, "what has that to do with this young man?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing," said the Judge. "Only he has a very influential friend, who can push him if he will. He gave him that horse he rides, worth more than any in my stable, by the by. Isabel, there may be something in that young man, after all."

Madam Lacy looked at him steadily.

"Let him prove it first, and I'll believe it afterward, Joseph. Mark my words, you will repent this expedition. That young man is just ambitious enough to want to marry your daughter and her fortune."

"Oh, nonsense," said the Judge. "It's all arranged to-day. Cornelius is to propose as they come back."

"Man proposes, but girls are fools sometimes," said the old lady, with a little sniff. "We shall see."

CHAPTER VII.

A RACE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

THERE are few things more exhilarating to the spirits than a rapid ride on a cool summer evening, along green country roads bordered with woods. The same paths that are quagmires in the spring, are elastic and smooth stretches of brown road, edged with close-cropped green turf, in the summer. The temptation to break into a trot and thence into a canter and gallop is almost irresistible; and thus it happened that our party of four soon forgot the Judge's warning, and were cantering away through the quiet country, past woods and hay fields, at a rattling pace.

The next thing was that madcap Nettie must needs propose a race, and strike Juliet Brinton's horse a sharp cut with her whip, which set the animal off at full speed, for he was nervous and highstrung. Miss Brinton, who happened to be riding carelessly on the snafflebit, the curb hanging loose on the pommel of the saddle, uttered a slight scream as she was thrown forward, and the next moment she was tearing down a long level piece of road like an arrow, while Nettie, rather pale at the consequence of her act, called out hastily:

"Quick, Armstrong! You've the best horse. She'll be thrown."

Cornelius Van Dyck uttered a low imprecation and started to follow, but his horse, a powerful, heavy beast, was clearly unequal to the task, and Armstrong suddenly dashed in his spurs and flew past him, rapidly gaining on the vanishing Amazon.

Nettie's little mare caught the infection, and ran away after the rest, from whence it presently happened that the four riders were strung out along the road; Juliet, closely followed by Armstrong, nearly half a mile ahead of Nettie Dashwood, whose fat little mare was already blowing loudly and covered with sweat, while Van Dyck's great beast was thundering in the rear, a good hundred yards behind Nettie.

At full speed miles vanish quickly. The long level stretch of road ended in a wood and curved around out of sight, so that the couple in front were lost to the view of the couple in rear inside of five minutes. Nettie laughed to herself as she saw them turn the corner; for Armstrong's splendid bay was already alongside of Juliet's brown.

"They're safe," she said aloud; "and now, Flora, my beauty, I don't think we need kill ourselves any longer. Woa! Flora, woa!"

And she pulled up the panting creature to a walk, just as Cornelius came thundering up.

"No use racing, Con," she said coolly. "The thing's settled. They've beat us both fairly, and Armstrong's ahead this time."

Van Dyck's heavy face was ashy pale, and he was evidently in a tearing passion.

"By ——!" he ejaculated in a savage growl, and paused, half choked.

"By Jove, sir, you mean—yes, you can say 'by Jove.' But don't swear bad words, Con. It's not proper."

This was said in the airiest of tones, the little woman looking him full in the eyes with a strange expression of menace.

Somehow or other Cornelius Van Dyck checked the furious oath on his lips and pulled up his horse.

"By Jove, Net, I don't know whether you're a girl or a

devil," he said a little more coolly. "Don't you know you might have killed Juliet with your mad folly? And now they're off, Lord knows where. Oh, come on, will you! We can catch them yet if you won't dawdle so."

"Not a bit of use, Con," said Miss Dashwood coolly. "Flora's like you. She's too fat to catch a thoroughbred. What a couple they do make, don't they? That Armstrong rides like a wizard. I'm not going to kill Flora to please your jealous whims. If you want to go on, take your old elephant and go."

"By Heavens, Net, I believe you put up this job on me," screamed the young man, thoroughly exasperated. "I'll be even with you for it though. Uncle Joseph shall bring you down, my lady."

"Why, Con, you poor innocent," said the girl in her sweetest tones, "what are you dreaming about? I don't profess to understand your elegant expressions, but I suppose you mean that I have been plotting against you."

"You understand slang well enough to talk it to those cubs at the Point," said her cousin with a bitter sneer. "It suits you to play innocent now. Yes; I do mean you plotted this to get Juliet out of my company. You knew my horse couldn't catch her's, and as for that beggar Armstrong, I'll get even with him. Fine friends he has to give him horses! Disgraced cadets, dismissed the service! Such fellows are enough to sicken one. I'll resign; I swear I will."

"Yes; you'd better," said the girl cruelly. "They say there's going to be an Indian war this summer, and you always were a coward when you were a boy. You know you were, Con."

The young man turned fairly livid with fury, and clutched his riding whip as if he meant to strike her. She shook her own whip tauntingly in his face.

"Not now, Con. You'd like to do it, but we're not

children any more now. Whips leave marks, and Armstrong would kill you for it."

The young man laughed savagely.

"You cursed witch, I believe you're in love with the fellow yourself."

In a moment the girl struck him with all her might over the broad shoulders, with such force that the whip broke. Then she turned her horse and galloped away toward home, without another word.

Cornelius, recalled to himself by the sting of the blow, looked stupidly after her for a moment, and then muttered, as he struck in his spurs:

"No, by Jove, that won't do at all."

He was soon behind her, for her pony seemed to be decidedly blown, and his own horse was well bred, if heavy.

"Net, I say, Net, I didn't mean to insult you," he called out. "I beg your pardon, Net—I do indeed. Here, old girl, turn back. By Jove, you know, we *must* find them, or Aunt Bell will raise old Hob with *you* about it. Come, come, don't be mad. I didn't mean any harm."

She allowed him to come close to her, before she slackened her pace, and then she halted and turned upon him imperiously.

"Beg my pardon, *instantly.*"

"I do, Net, I do," said he, humbly enough.

"Confess that it was nothing but your own bad heart that made you suggest such a thing," she went on, very fiercely.

"Well, I suppose it was, Net. But I was angry, you know, and a fellow isn't responsible for what he says then."

"Oh, Con, you're worse than an idiot," she said, still angrily, as she turned her horse once more. "First you accuse me of plotting to bring Armstrong and Juliet together to spite you, and then you say I am in love with the

man myself! You know a great deal about women, don't you?"

She ended with a sneer that discomfited the young man completely.

"No, no, Net; of course I see it wouldn't be reasonable. But you certainly *are* a precious hot friend of his. You must admit that."

"And do you know why, Con?" she said softly.

"Because he is like me, poor and ambitious. His father left him nothing but brains, and so did mine to me. I feel as if he might be my brother."

Lumbering Cornelius nodded his head slowly and grinned. His good humor seemed to be restored, and they jogged on at an amble.

"All right, Net," he said. "You *did* put up a pretty smart trick on me, I'll admit, but I know a trick worth two of it. You'll see what it is before the summer's over."

She curled her lip slightly, but for some reason did not answer him. Nettie Dashwood knew how to hold her tongue on occasion.

They soon entered the wood into which the track curved, and it stretched before them quite empty. No sign of the fugitives was to be seen, though several hundred yards of road were visible. They quickened their pace a little and trotted on. At the next turn a stretch of five miles went out of the wood into a champaign country below, and so into a white village. Two or three carts were coming up the way, raising little clouds of dust, but not a symptom could be seen of the runaways. Cornelius scanned the prospect with lowering brow.

"They've not taken *that* road," he said sulkily.

"Of course not," said Nettie sharply. "They've gone to the Brinton Manor-House, as they said they would. We shall meet them coming back."

"Well, then, let's get on," said he, shaking his bridle.

"We've fooled away half our time, jawing each other about nothing."

"Who began it, I'd like to know?" responded the lady tartly. "It was you, with your violence and *horrible* language, threatening to *strike* me—a thing which no *gentleman* would have done."

"Look here, Net, can't we stop that?" said Van Dyck pleadingly. "You women never know when to leave off. I begged your pardon just now, didn't I?"

"Yes, Cornelius, but——" Here an alarming spasm contracted the young lady's throat, and she began to sob.

"Good Lord! What's the matter now?" groaned the unsympathetic Cornelius.

"The matter is—*sob*—that you dared to insult me—*sob*—that you said—*sob*—you said—*sob*—horrid things, all *untrue*—*sob*—and you men don't know how we women feel about such things—*sob*—and you've hurt me dreadfully—*sob*—and—oh, Cornelius, I didn't think you'd have treated your poor little orphan cousin so *shamefully!*" Grand burst of sobs, and Nettie nearly off her horse. Dead halt in consequence.

Cornelius Van Dyck felt like a fool. He sat looking at Nettie in despair, till it suddenly occurred to him to try consolation.

"See here, Net," he said, "if you'll only forgive me, I swear it shan't happen again. I was a great brute——"

"*That* you were!"

"Yes, I admit it. But——"

"I'm glad you do. You ought to be *ashamed* of yourself to speak to a *lady* so."

"See here, Net! If you'll only shut up, by Heavens, I'll get you a pair of earrings," cried the young man in utter desperation.

To his amazement the sobs redoubled.

"*You don't* mean it. It's like you—*sob*—promised me

last Christmas, when you wanted me—*sob*—to tell you about Juliet. You'll—*sob*—put me off with a—*sob*—trumpery little garnet—*sob*—and I don't believe you!"

The hollow rumble of approaching wheels here startled Van Dyck, who called out:

"Oh, hush, for God's sake, Net! Here comes a wagon. I swear I'll go to Tiffany's for them to-morrow if you'll stop."

"Do you mean—*sob*—real diamonds?"

"Yes, yes, Net. Only *do* stop!"

"Solitaires?"—*sob*.

"Well, not exactly—yes, yes; anything, by Jove. They'll see you, Net."

She suddenly straightened up in her saddle with a look of angelic sweetness.

"Remember, it's a promise, sir," she said. "You go to town to-morrow and get them, or you'll never get Juliet."

Old Farmer Whiteside rumbled round the corner behind his mare Polly, in his Rockaway, and Nettie halted the old man and entered into a long and interesting discussion as to the best thing for rheumatism, with which worthy Mrs. Whiteside was periodically laid up.

Poor, outwitted Cornelius sat fuming and chafing, but perfectly unable to interpose a word between the garrulous old farmer and Nettie, who kept up a lively, rambling conversation, skipping from Mrs. Whiteside to the crops, thence to the price of hay, and thence back to rheumatism.

At last the young man could stand it no longer.

"Oh, dash it, Net," he cried, "we shall never get to the Manor to-night. Come on, *do!*"

The air of sweet surprise with which she turned, and the martyred expression of her face as she affectionately bade the farmer farewell, were a study.

Old Whiteside drove off muttering:

"By Gosh, he's a darned hog, and that gal's jest a boss angel—*that's* what *she* is. I'd like to knock the stuffing out of him, though."

Nettie trotted away with gay docility, till they reached the fork of the road leading to the Manor.

There, in the red light of the afternoon sun, were Armstrong and Juliet, peaceably walking their horses back, as if nothing had happened. Cornelius Van Dyck swore to himself like a pirate, and Nettie smiled like an angel as they trotted on to meet them.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MANOR-HOUSE.

WHETHER Juliet Brinton was a willing accomplice in the little escapade caused by Nettie's riding whip is one of those things which no man, be he even an author, can be expected to decide. She certainly screamed when she started; for the horse, in jerking his head free, threw her on the pommel of the saddle, and when he set off on his wild race she bent back in the first three bounds as if her shoulders might touch the crupper. In another moment, however, she had regained her self-control, and sat up in the saddle, a little back, the spine yielding to every jump of the thoroughbred with an elastic motion as they scoured away.

Her eyes were so full of water she could hardly see as they tore on, but the road was level and firm, and she felt there was no danger. Then she heard the rapid hoof-beats of Armstrong's horse behind, and her own animal seemed to leap half out of its skin with emulation. It became a real task to ride him; for the motion of a hard race is very different from the regular pulsations of the common gallop, as the girl soon found out. Instinctively she settled down low in the saddle, grasped the snaffle reins firmly, and tore on, while the bay thoroughbred of the young officer crept slowly but surely past the quarter of the brown horse which she rode.

Armstrong was alongside of her as they entered the wood, and the road curved off to the left, which gave him the inside of the circle. Away they went round the curve,

and his right hand was already extended to catch the hanging curb-rein, which was dangling in a dangerous manner, when they came to the fork of the roads: then Juliet's brown, evading the grasp of his pursuer, shied off to the right down the road to the Manor, while Armstrong was nearly thrown by the unexpected wrench of his own horse.

As it was, he lost both stirrups, and before he had settled into the new direction the brown horse had gained at least twenty yards on him, so that it became a stern chase once more. The young man set his teeth and dug in his spurs so sharply that his own horse fairly flew after the brown, gaining at every stride, and in about five minutes more was alongside again. Then Armstrong saw something that rather surprised him, but relieved him of much anxiety. Miss Brinton was sitting well in her saddle and had caught up her curb-rein by the middle, though she was still riding on the snaffle.

She smiled brightly in answer to his anxious look; for they were now close together. Her face was flushed with excitement, and her large dark-blue eyes looked positively glorious as she turned them on him. She was radiant as Diana Venatrix.

"I have him now," she panted. "Let them go, Mr.—Mr. Armstrong. He shan't run away again in a—a hurry."

And Miss Brinton laid on her whip sharply. Already both horses were black with sweat, and the brown had evidently had about enough of it; but still they dashed on, past the silent woods, and mile after mile flitted by in a whirl of speed. Then, as both horses were breathing hard and dripping with foam, they began to slacken speed of their own accord, bounding high in air, and suddenly dashed into a large open glade of the woods, past two stone gate-posts. There, in front of them, stood a quaint old stone house, with a gable faced with Dutch bricks, the

edge of the roof fashioned like steps of stairs, while the figures "1679," made of iron bars six feet long, occupied the centre of the gable.

By one consent the riders pulled up, and sat still looking at the old pile. The brown horse, too fat for such work, stood panting heavily, the foam dropping from his flanks on the ground, while Armstrong's bay was still champing his bit and fidgetting, as if anxious to be off again.

"Well, Mr. Armstrong," said the lady, with a little nervous laugh, "here we are at the Brinton Manor-House, sooner than we expected. I'm afraid my father will scold about running the horses so much, but we couldn't help it, could we?"

Armstrong smiled as he looked at her. He felt a strange sensation of triumph.

"I don't know that I would have helped it, if I could," he said. "It was a glorious ride, and has a glorious ending."

He looked her full in the face, and she flushed in a moment at the meaning in his eyes. Hastily she gathered up her reins and directed her horse toward the house.

"There is the old Brinton Manor," she began glibly. "Originally it was built by the Van Amstels—that was my grandmother Brinton's family, you know. It was the old farmhouse, as you see, and seven generations of Van Amstels lived and died there, before it came to my grandfather Brinton. It used to be called the Van Amstel Manor till then, and——"

Armstrong's horse was walking close beside her, and he was smiling in an absent-minded fashion that augured small attention to the story. Suddenly, however, he interrupted her.

"The Van Amstels were what, Miss Brinton?"

"Oh, they were farmers," she answered simply, "like

like your parents, Mr. Armstrong. We don't profess to be a fine family, you know. Aunt Isabel's different: you must remember the Lacys were colonial governors once. But we Brintons don't pretend to be nobles in disguise. Plain farmers and traders, all of us."

The young man's eyes glowed with hope. These words, coming after Madam Lacy's pointed sarcasms, were like balm to his irritated pride.

"Oh, Miss Brinton," he burst out, "thank you for saying that! I know you're far, far above me in worth of soul. I feel like a dog who ought to crawl at your feet. But I can't help it. You know what I feel. You must have seen it long ago—that I worship the very ground you tread on. I am going away. I know I deserve nothing from you, but, oh, if you would think of me sometimes, when I am out on the plains—if you would but remember that the poor dragoon, with nothing but his sword and his love, is dreaming of you every day and night—I think—I think—I could be happier."

As usual in such cases, the young man was far from coherent. As a model of correct English his speech was plainly deficient. It was difficult to tell exactly what he wanted.

But Juliet Brinton understood him perfectly: at least she answered him quite softly:

"Mr. Armstrong, I shall always think of you with great interest, and believe me, I shall watch for your name in the papers and pray for your success."

They were in front of the house as she spoke. The old building was silent and apparently deserted, heavy wooden shutters closing all the windows. The steps were green with moss, and grass grew high around the basement wall. The front of the house shot boldly out from a more modern-looking brick extension behind, which stretched out into two wings; and as they passed the front they saw

that an open shed, with stone pillars and a high-pitched moss-grown roof, connected the wing with a huge old-fashioned barn. In the midst of this broad and hospitable-looking shed, stood a dark-gray horse, tied to a ring; and the animal set up a glad whinny of welcome the instant he saw them.

Juliet started and checked her horse, just as she heard some steps behind them. The quavering voice of an old man spoke:

"Monsieur Mac Diarmid eez note at 'ome to-day, mademoiselle, and I regret to say ze place eez note op-en in heez ab-*sence.*"

Armstrong wheeled his horse and confronted old Baptiste Conneau, obsequious, but evidently repellent of their visit.

"Does John Mac Diarmid live *here?*" he asked in a tone of astonishment.

Old Baptiste shrugged and bowed and shrugged.

"Et eez heez place, monsieur! 'E bought eet ofe Monsieur Breen-tone, but 'e eez note at 'ome. Non, monsieur, ze 'ouse eez *fermé*—close."

"I am sorry," began Armstrong. "I should like to see the old fellow before I go. Don't you know this horse, old man? It came from your master's stable."

Baptiste shrugged his shoulders and half closed his eyes with persistent repulsion.

"I know nossing of 'orse, monsieur."

"At least you know whose horse *that* is," said Armstrong, pointing to the gray under the shed, which was fidgetting from side to side in great excitement.

Baptiste started a little, and the color mounted into his faded old cheeks. He began to talk to himself in French about "the people of this country here are pigs. They have manners no more than of the savages. They cannot see that one may be invisible without being absent."

Armstrong smiled as he turned to Miss Brinton.

"The old fellow is far from complimentary, Miss Brinton. I fear we must depart, but I'm very sorry. Did you know that this house belongs to my old friend, of whom I told you that night at West Point? So it seems."

Juliet started, and her manner changed.

"What? *That* gentleman? Why, I thought——"

She was interrupted by a deep, melodious voice behind her, with a peculiar musical intonation in its accent.

"You had better dismount, Armstrong. Your horses have been ridden too hard."

Both started, and the lady crimsoned in a moment. A man had approached unobserved while they were talking to the servant, and now stood regarding them. It was Mac Diarmid.

He spoke to Armstrong, but his glowing eyes were fixed on Miss Brinton.

"You must certainly alight, old fellow," he went on. "We can offer you a glass of wine after your ride, and the young lady will be welcomed by my sister."

Frank Armstrong hesitated a moment and looked at Juliet, who was now excessively confused, for some reason. He hardly knew what to do, in his ignorance of the proprieties of life. Mac Diarmid was his friend, but he realized instinctively that it would not do to compromise the lady in his charge by allowing her to enter a strange house.

"Thank you, old fellow," he said constrainedly. Then he walked his horse forward and spoke in a low tone.

"Can't do it, Mac. We've run away from the rest of the party. You're all alone, old fellow."

Mac Diarmid never took his great dark eyes off those of Juliet Brinton, and she sat on her horse as if under some strange fascination, her eyes alternately raised to meet his and falling again, while her deep blush betrayed her confusion.

"It is well," said Mac Diarmid softly. "Introduce me then."

Not knowing how to refuse, Frank hastily performed the ceremony, and Mac Diarmid advanced to the side of Juliet's horse with the grace of a perfect gentleman.

"I hope Miss Brinton will not be frightened away by the appearance of this solitary house," he said in his deep musical tones; "but will repeat her visit with her relatives. We have but recently bought this place, and my sister has not yet been visited by any of the families in the neighborhood, though Judge Brinton led us to expect a different state of things."

Juliet Brinton, usually so placid and collected, trembled and stammered in her reply.

"Yes, we have been very busy—I mean away—and so —but my aunt intends to call next week—I think."

She ended with her eyes fixed full on those of Mac Diarmid, who stood before her, and she turned as white as she had been red. Something in this man seemed to fascinate and terrify her strangely. Yet he was extremely handsome as he stood there. His lithe, sinewy figure was half a head taller than that of Armstrong, and his keen aquiline features, close shaven and of olive tint, were like those of a bronze statue. But his eyes, large, dark and mysterious, possessed a strange power as they fascinated hers. She seemed unable to withdraw them, and trembled all over. He smiled gravely, and gave a backward fling of his long black hair.

"I shall expect you both, Miss Brinton," he said. Then he turned away to Armstrong with a brisk air.

"Well, old fellow, if you won't, you won't. Many thanks for the introduction. Good-by."

Juliet Brinton gave a nervous shudder as he turned his back and strode away. Then she cut her horse with the whip and galloped out of the clearing.

Not till they were out of sight of the house did she pause and pull up to a walk. Then she burst out:

"Oh, Mr. Armstrong, that man is the evil one himself! Ugh!"

And she shivered all over with a nervous spasm as they walked their horses along. Then she suddenly straightened up and said:

"Not a word of this to Nettie or Cornelius. I trust to your honor. Here they are."

As she spoke they came in sight of the other members of their party, who were coming to meet them at a sharp trot.

CHAPTER IX.

FORT MARENGO.

A TALL, wiry-looking gentleman, with silver leaves on the yellow shoulder-straps of his neat army blouse, sat at his desk in the commandant's house at Fort Marengo. As he raised his eyes from his work they glanced through a large window and rested on the enclosure of the fort. There were the long lines of barracks, built of white pine lumber, glaring in the sun; the cavalry stables behind them at the further end; and closer by, on one side, neat two-story houses, the officers' quarters.

The commandant's house at Fort Marengo was built a little back from the rest, and had more architectural pretensions, being a picturesque two-story cottage with a projecting roof and a broad, airy veranda. The commandant's office was a long, lofty room, with a huge fireplace at one end. The walls were ornamented with splendid trophies of game, handsomely mounted, the savage front of a bison looking down from one wall, flanked by the delicate, graceful heads of two prong-horned antelopes, while the nobly curving antlers of big-horn and red deer gave a wild, fantastic air to the portraits with which they were intermingled.

It was pretty clear from the trophies that Lieutenant-Colonel St. Aure was an enthusiastic sportsman, and the facts did not belie the assumption. The furniture of the room was old and shabby, but it looked rich and luxurious, covered as every seat was with some handsome fur or skin.

Just over the Colonel's desk, which stood against the wall, was the head of a grizzly bear, admirably mounted, the jaws half open to expose the grinning tusks, between which reposed, in quaint security, the commandant's penholders. Two prairie wolves' heads, as natural as life, sly cunning legible in every line, grinned behind him on the opposite wall, above Colonel St. Aure's spurs, which dangled from the horn of an antelope. The hat rack was another red deer's head, and liberally ornamented with caps, uniform coats, a helmet, sabre and revolver, while several rifles leaned against the corner. The portraits were those of the same person at various periods of life and in various dresses, but they were all St. Aure.

The commandant raised his head thoughtfully from his writing, and laid down his pen. Then, as the breeze came sweeping in, blowing his papers about, he moved his paperweight to stay the damage, and somehow he remained staring at the implement.

It was an ordinary little thing—a block of very fine limpid plate glass, with a piece of cloth pasted on the bottom, under a little photograph of a lady. Such things are common enough, but Colonel St. Aure remained staring absently at the portrait.

It was a sweet, dark, Spanish-looking face, an effect increased by the peculiar fashion of dressing the hair, a black lace veil falling from a high comb behind smooth braids. This lady wore a sort of half pathetic pleading look in her picture, a soft smile hovering on her lips, as if she were trying to persuade you to agree with her in something, and you felt in looking at the picture that one could refuse such a face nothing.

As the Colonel gazed at this portrait, a sort of dreamy speculation came into his eyes, and he sat quite still, with his face resting on both hands, staring away. As he *looked, the door* softly opened behind him, and the origi-

nal of the picture glided noiselessly into the room—the same face, with its tender, appealing smile, but with little rings of hair clustering round the white forehead instead of the smooth bands in the photograph. Mrs. St. Aure had given in to the vanity of frizettes, to all seeming. She was dressed in white, with the same black lace veil as in the carte-de-visite.

She came softly behind her husband, and laid both hands on his shoulders without saying a word.

St. Aure never stirred, but went on looking at the face as if he had felt nothing.

"Am I changed much, Bertie?" asked a soft, low, cooing voice. "It's ten years ago, dear."

He made no answer for some minutes, and when he spoke it was in continuation of his own train of thought, apparently.

"What a time I had to get that little woman, Elsie! I believe I worked harder for her than I did for my two stars. She was so precise and good, and so fond of her father and her cousins, and every one else except me, in those days. I was just thinking how things come round in this world. Bertie St. Aure, scapegrace and ne'er-do-weel, as they used to call him in Madison, took the flower of the town after all. Eh, Elsie? Do you remember how you used to turn up that little nose of yours at 'that St. Aure boy,' as they called him? But I won her after all."

He had been speaking in a thoughtful, absent tone, as if merely pursuing a reverie. St. Aure had a clear, penetrating voice.

"Sometimes I think she was hardly worth winning, Bertie," said the lady in her soft, cooing tones. "She has helped you so little on your path, and yet she does long so to see you great and famous."

St. Aure turned round in his chair, and drew his wife down on his knee.

"Elsie, darling," he said, "you have been the star of my life, and I never did a worthy action that you did not inspire. Before I met you, I was a reckless youngster, who might have made a great soldier—or a great scamp. You decided against the scamp, and made the soldier. Little woman, you have done more. You have been the angel of every camp and garrison where I have commanded, and there are hundreds to bless you wherever you go."

Elsie St. Aure listened with eager ears to the sweet words of praise from her husband, playing absently with his light, wavy hair as she listened. It was a very pretty picture, but suddenly interrupted by a sharp rap at the door.

Mrs. St. Aure sprang up as if she had been shot, and the Colonel seized his pen, while the lady began to dust one of the antelope heads.

"Come in!" cried St. Aure. Then he threw down his pen with a laugh, as a tall and splendidly handsome young man entered the room. The new comer was in full cavalry uniform, and the aiguilettes on his right shoulder announced him as the post-adjutant, while the brown book under his arm was as clearly the morning reports.

Lieutenant Charles Peyton was the beauty of the garrison by common consent, and one of the best officers there. His smooth young face, with its rounded fleshy curves, was much like that of the Greek Apollo; and the union in him of very fair curly hair and tender brown eyes made him irresistible to most women. He had a sweet serious smile, and an expression more like that of a young clergyman than a soldier; yet he was noted for his coolness in action.

"Well, Charley, you nearly caught the two old turtle-doves billing and cooing, my boy," said St. Aure, with his own frank smile. "We didn't know but it was some one outside of the family, and discipline must be maintained."

The young adjutant smiled faintly and bowed.

"I ventured to bring you the morning reports, Colonel," he said in a low, musical voice. "Will you be kind enough to examine them, sir, and sign them?"

St. Aure looked at him quizzically, and turned to his wife, who was smiling at Peyton.

"I say, Elsie," he said, "did you ever see such a mournful spectacle—an officer on duty who is so forgetful of the respect due to the commandant as to appear before him with one side of his face covered with burnt cork? Why, Charley, who's been playing tricks on you?"

For a moment the adjutant looked troubled, and his hand involuntarily moved, but he caught Mrs. St. Aure's eye, and stopped the motion. Instead, he opened the book and laid it gravely on the table before the commandant, saying:

"Will you oblige me by signing it, Colonel?"

St. Aure looked at him a moment in the same quizzical manner, and suddenly uttered a wild Indian yell, while he lifted his hand as if to clutch the other's clustering curls. Adjutant Peyton set his teeth firmly and his eyelids quivered, but he never started. He merely took up the pen without a smile, dipped it into the ink and handed it to St. Aure. The commandant made a last grimace, which failed to move the gravity of his subordinate, and then took the pen. His whole manner changed as he did so. His thin, hollow-cheeked face, with its lofty forehead, sweeping blonde moustache and cleft chin, became set in official sternness, an effect increased by his bushy eyebrows.

"Very good, sir," he said. "Duty is duty."

Then he sat down and dashed off his name in great bold letters—HERBERT ST. AURE—after which he turned in his chair and said in an ordinary tone of voice:

"How's Minnie to-day, Charles? She looked splendid at the party last night."

"Pretty well, thank you. A little sleepy, you know. Minnie's not a veteran campaigner like Elsie there: so I believe—well, in fact—I doubt if she's up yet," answered Peyton, his whole manner changing at once to that of an intimate friend. "I say, General, you nearly got me on the burnt cork though. Mrs. St. Aure, I thank you for your look. It saved me."

"How's the guard this morning, Charley?" asked the Colonel with a slight yawn. He was evidently bored by routine duties, but attended to them conscientiously.

"All tidy and neat, Colonel. One officer reported absent from stables—Captain St. Aure."

"Have you asked for his excuse, sir?"

Both officers were again stiff and formal.

"Yes, Colonel. Said he didn't hear the call, sir."

"Put him under arrest at once, sir. That Jim St. Aure is enough to ruin the discipline of any garrison," said the Colonel sharply.

Peyton wheeled round.

"Very good, Colonel."

Mrs. St. Aure laid her hand on his arm.

"One moment, Charley, please. You're not going to put poor Jim under arrest again, Bertie, dear, are you? Why, it's only last night he came out."

Colonel St. Aure was already scribbling away, his bushy brows bent over the strong, resolute nose, so full of character. He never lifted his eyes.

"Mr. Peyton, you heard my orders," he said sternly.

The commandant's wife drew back in silence, and Peyton left the room, where nothing was heard for several minutes but the scratching of St. Aure's pen.

Mrs. St. Aure came quietly back, and sat down in a large armchair close to her husband, then took some work from her pocket and tranquilly began to sew. St. Aure *scribbled* on for about half an hour without a word, till he

suddenly rose up, after closing his page with a flourish, and threw down his pen. Then he sat a moment, running his hands through his hair. Mrs. St. Aure quietly rose, took up the pen, wiped it on the wings of a little velvet moth, and placed it between the teeth of the grizzly bear's head over the desk.

St. Aure's stern face relaxed into a smile.

"Yes; I've finished, Elsie," he said. "Let's go and see poor Jim and ask him to breakfast. I begin to feel hungry, Mrs. St. Aure."

"Well, you go and get Jim, and I'll order breakfast," said the lady brightly, kissing him as she spoke. "You're a dear, good Bertie, after all."

A few moments later Colonel St. Aure, his broad white felt hat on the back of his head, was striding along the boarded walk in front of the officers' quarters. He had a peculiar, long, nervous stride, the head turning from side to side as if nothing escaped his keen gray eyes, while his face wore its usual thoughtful frown. He walked very fast, snapping his fingers as he went and softly whistling to himself. He seemed absorbed in thought, but his eye missed nothing. Every sentry who saluted him received a punctilious return of the compliment, in his rapid, nervous manner.

At last he paused before one of the houses in the row. A black servant was polishing a pair of boots on the basement steps.

"Colonel St. Aure in?" said the commandant sharply.

The black grinned from ear to ear.

"Yis, Marse Gin'ral, yis. De Cunnel's feelin' powerful bad dis mornin', sar. Say he done got out of dress parade, sar."

St. Aure smiled grimly

"You rascal, you! The next time you get my brother into arrest through your laziness I'll have you put out-

side the fort for the Indians to get hold of. You hear that?"

The negro became serious instantly.

"Yis, Gin'ral, yis. It war my fault, sar. Done took too much corn juice, I reckon."

"Corn juice will bring your scalp into a Sioux *teepee* yet, Elisha," said the commandant solemnly. "You remember what I said."

He ascended the steps and walked into the house, the front door being wide open.

In the parlor sat a young man in uniform, swinging to and fro in a rocking chair and smoking.

"Jim, old boy," said St. Aure, looking in, "Elsie wants you to come to breakfast. The commandant will be absent from quarters till after that meal, but I heard him say he was going to release Captain St. Aure from arrest in time for dress-parade."

"The commandant's an infernal, pig-headed martinet," grumbled the young man as he rose. "I swear, Bertie, I'd sooner be at any other post in the——"

"No, you wouldn't, Jim," said the Colonel laughing, and he linked his arm in his brother's and bore him off in triumph.

CHAPTER X.

THE ST. AUBES.

ONE of the most puzzling things to find out, for a novice coming to a post in the American army, is the exact rank of the officers he meets. We will suppose that he has studied up the marks of rank on shoulderstraps before he has left home, expressly to avoid solecisms. He knows that a plain strap indicates a second lieutenant, a bar at each end of the strap a first lieutenant, two bars a captain, a gold leaf a major, and a silver leaf a lieutenant colonel. The higher ranks cost him still less trouble; for the silver eagle of the colonel, the star of the brigadier, and the two stars of the major general, are all marked and distinctive. He has even learned that the ground of the strap indicates the arm of the service, and can tell an infantry officer by his light blue, a cavalryman by the yellow, an artillerist by the scarlet, a staff officer by his dark blue or black. Consequently he thinks he knows all about it, and yet he finds himself all abroad the first day. He sees a second lieutenant, as he thinks, and hears him called "captain," "major," or "colonel" at one time, and plain "Mr. Blank" at another. He hears Adjutant Straightlace make his report to Major Stablemore, and hears the same adjutant pledge the same major an hour later at the post-trader's bar as "General, your health, sir," to which the general, or major, or both, as it may be, responds amicably, "Drink hearty, Colonel."

Young Mr. Innocent feels considerably puzzled over all this, and wonders what it can mean, till he flies to his

friend Lieutenant Smithers, just joined from "the Point." As a new graduate, Smithers is fondly supposed "to understand all these things, you know." Sure enough, there are very few things in the way of tactics and regulations which Smithers has not got at his fingers' ends, and he enlightens our friend on the subject.

Producing a particularly tattered copy of the Army Register for the year, he turns to the heading "TWENTY-FOURTH CAVALRY," and shows his guest the page whereon are the names of the officers of the whole regiment.

"See here, my infant," he says, lighting his pipe. "You see there's the name on the first column. For example, Augustus Blazer, colonel. Next column, after 'Date of commission,' is headed 'Original entry into service and subsequent commissions.' There, you see old Blazer began as a second lieutenant Third Infantry, went up to captain in 1860, major in 1861; colonel of 897th N. Y. Vols., 1861; B. G. Vols., 1863 (that's brigadier, you know); major general in 1865; mustered out in 1866, and brevetted brigadier and major general U. S. A. same date. That's all about it."

"But I don't quite understand," says Mr. Innocent. "Why do they call him 'General' sometimes and 'Colonel' at others?"

"That's according to whether you're on duty or not," says Smithers sagely. "You know Congress has abolished brevet rank entirely on official occasions."

"No; I didn't know it."

"Well, they did, and prohibit the wearing of the insignia of brevet rank in uniform. If they could, I believe they'd take away all the brevet commissions altogether. But it *does* make it puzzling."

Mr. Innocent ruminates some time.

"But what ought *I* to call Blazer when I speak to him?" he asks.

"Always call him 'General.' *You're* not on duty. The etiquette is always to call an army man by his highest brevet rank on social occasions. You just study this list, and you'll see every man's name, with his rank and brevets. Then you won't make any mistakes."

"But how do *you* get on?" asks Innocent.

"I go on a simple plan, which old Blazer gave us himself. 'Gentlemen,' he used to say, 'if I catch any of you calling me anything but "Colonel" when you're reporting or taking orders, I'll clap him in arrest. And if any of you undertake to call me anything but "General" when we're off duty, I'll kick him instantly.'"

This little conversation may give an idea of the reasons for some of the confusion of nomenclature at Fort Marengo. Colonel St. Aure was a brevet major general, like our old friend Slaughter at Napoleon; and his brother, Captain James St. Aure, was a brevet colonel; while poor Charley Peyton, not old enough to have earned rank in the civil war, was plain Mr. Peyton, the etiquette of the army forbidding the use of the title "lieutenant" in speaking of or to an officer of that rank.

"Colonel Jim," as St. Aure's brother was familiarly known in the garrison, was very like the General in face, but a good deal younger and softer. He had the same expression of sly fun lurking in the corner of his eye, the same strong, sensible features, gray eyes and light wavy hair; but he lacked the stern repose of the General's manner, acquired in the school of hard service among rivals anxious to pick flaws in his conduct. Colonel Jim had no enemies. Every one liked him, and his men adored him; but he was perpetually in scrapes with his commanding officer, who seemed to be more severe on him than any officer of the garrison. It was a joke at the post that Jim St. Aure passed two days in every week under arrest.

This morning as the three people—the General and hi-

brother and Mrs. St. Aure—sat at breakfast together, the cool breeze rustling the white curtains, it was evident that Jim was a little sulky. All his army experience had not yet taught him to preserve the rigid distinction between official and social relations on which the General constantly insisted, and he felt as little reconciled to his brother Bertie as he did to "Lieutenant Colonel St. Aure, Twelfth Cavalry, commanding post."

Mrs. St. Aure, gentle peace-maker as she always was, exchanged glances of intelligence with her husband at the reserved manner of the young man, and presently said:

"Jim, I want to do ever so much worsted work this morning, and I haven't a single skein wound. Can't you come over and help me?"

Jim's face relaxed from its expression of martyrdom, and he said drily:

"I suppose I could, if it wasn't for breaking my arrest. I'm supposed to be in my quarters, Elsie."

General St. Aure smiled, but said nothing. The lady turned gravely to her husband.

"Colonel St. Aure, I wish to secure the services of the Captain this morning. Can you oblige me?"

The General's eyes twinkled.

"Certainly, madam. Captain St. Aure's place of arrest is changed. I wish him to confine himself to the precincts of the commandant's parlor during the commandant's absence on duty. He will be released from arrest at five o'clock, in time for dress parade."

He spoke with perfect gravity, and then suddenly jumped up and slapped his brother on the shoulder.

"Jim, you scoundrel, I've got a new pony I bought from that Pawnee fellow, Red Arrow, and I'll run him against your mare Sensation that you've been bragging about ever since you came to this post. D'ye hear? Ten *dollars you can't* beat him on a quarter of a mile dash."

Jim's face brightened, and he jumped up at once.

"Done!" he said. "And I'll run heats, best three in five, if you like. I know your pony, Bertie, and Red Arrow cheated you. He can't run for sour apples. Run you to-morrow—no, by Jove, there's a moon to-night, and that tyrannical old martinet, the post commander, has had the grace to let me off arrest. I'll run you to-night, if you like."

"All right, Jim," said St. Aure laughing. "That commandant of ours loves to see a handsome dress parade, you know, and Captain St. Aure manages to bring out his company in pretty good shape."

"I know it, you old fox. If I'd thought of that, I'd have broken my arrest, so you'd have had to put a sentry over me. There, now!"

"No, you wouldn't, Jim. You're only talking. That black villain, Elisha Purdy, of yours, let it out this morning how you were going to get off dress parade any how, so I stopped your game."

"Then I'll tan his black skin for him," quoth Jim revengefully.

"Can't do it, Jim. You're under orders here till the afternoon, and then you won't have more than time to get into your pretties before the bugle sounds. Own up, Jim, I caught you squarely this time. If you lie in bed and miss stables, others will do it, and lay it all to the example of the General's brother. I can't have people say that I'm strict on others and partial to my own family. Remember, Jim, our position is very delicate in the service, and a soldier's first idea must be that of fidelity to his duty."

St. Aure ended with his hand on his brother's shoulder, and the two looked into each other's eyes a moment. Then Jim said:

"It's all right, Bertie. I swear I'm sorry, old fellow. It shan't happen again."

The brothers *shook* hands hard, and Jim turned away,

caught his sister-in-law round the waist and waltzed her into the parlor, singing:

"Come o'er the sea, maiden, with me,"

till he seated her on the sofa, rushed for her work basket, which he flung on her lap, then, bringing a stool, sat down and held up his hands.

"Mrs. St. Aure, I'm ready, mum. Bring on your old worsteds. My great revenge hath stomach for them all. I say, Elsie, when are those girls coming that you've been promising were to visit you this summer?"

General St. Aure smiled thoughtfully as he turned away to his office and took up his hat to go out.

"Dear old Jim!" he muttered. "He makes a splendid officer after all, and I'm too hard on him."

Mrs. St. Aure, placid and smiling as usual, answered Jim's question.

"I expect them every day, Jim. There's quite a little party, you know, and they're swell people. Bertie met the Judge at New York last winter, when we were on our usual trip, and he promised to bring us a party. We may hear of them any day."

"How many girls are there?" queried Jim.

"Two—both pretty, and one with a fortune, Jim."

Jim shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't want either. That sort don't take to our housekeeping kindly. Want too many French frills."

"Oh, I don't know that, Jim. They're both pleasant, unaffected girls, especially the heiress. I liked her immensely."

"What is she like?" asked Jim, twiddling his left thumb to keep the skein from falling off.

Mrs. St. Aure wound patiently away for several turns before she answered.

"H'm! Let me see. About as tall as Minnie, but *black hair,* with very dark blue eyes. Sings, plays——"

"Can she make a rice pudding?" asked Jim, in a gruff tone.

"I don't know, Jim."

"Then I don't want her, if she can't. What's the other like?"

"Oh, a pert little thing," said Mrs. St. Aure coldly. "I didn't like her so much."

Jim smiled reflectively at the vanishing skein.

"Do you know, Elsie, I shouldn't wonder if she's the dangerous one for the garrison here?"

"Why, Jim?"

"Oh, I've always noticed that these dreadful good girls that you ladies love so much and throw at our heads for models, are apt to be bores, while the pert little things, as you call them, take the men's fancy at once."

Mrs. St. Aure looked cold and stately. Her early life had been cradled in Puritanism, and she had not quite rubbed off all the crust, even yet.

"You mean the flirts, Jim. Such girls have many lovers, but I've noticed they don't find husbands so easily. Men will do a great deal before they ask such a butterfly to share their future lives, and if they do it in haste, they repent it at leisure."

Here the sound of a distant bugle, faint and far off, came floating through the window, and Jim turned his head.

"Who's out?" he said, half to himself. "We've no scouting parties out this week. That must be some one coming into the post."

"What did it sound, dear?" asked Mrs. St. Aure, who, with all her experience of army life, took so little interest in details that she hardly knew the difference between reveillé and tattoo on the bugle.

"It said 'Column left,'" answered Jim, as he listened.

Presently the bugle sounded again, a gay, rapid air.

Jim St. Aure jumped up and dropped the skein.

"By Jove, it *is* some one coming. That's 'right front into line.' They're getting themselves into shape to come into the post. I wonder who it can be. I didn't know there were any orders for troops to come here."

Mrs. St. Aure smiled gently and then sighed.

"Come back, Jim, and take up your skein," she said. "My poor lad, that's why Bertie went out so early. There are secret orders to concentrate a large force here in case of Indian hostilities, and I'm afraid I shall lose you all again very soon, Jimmy dear."

Jim St. Aure came back and sat down in silence, ruminating over the news.

CHAPTER XI.

THE NEW OFFICERS.

GENERAL ST. AURE, his white hat on the back of his head as usual, but wearing a sword under his sack coat, stood at the gate of Fort Marengo looking out on the baked-up plain, covered with short yellowish grass. Adjutant Peyton, no longer in full uniform, but wearing an undress sack coat and a white hat like his chief, stood near him, his arm through the bridle of a big black horse. St. Aure was watching an approaching column glittering with weapons, followed by the white tilts of a wagon train. A little distance off, to the right of the entrance, rose two or three conical structures of poles, covered with brown hides, that the veriest novice who had ever seen a picture would have pronounced to be Indian wigwams—or *teepees*, as they call them on the plains. A few dirty, pot-bellied children, almost naked, their black, matted hair falling over their eyes, were rolling about in the dust, and two ancient hags, as ugly as Macbeth's witches, were chattering over a buffalo hide, which they were scraping with the shoulder blades of the defunct owner of the skin. A single Indian man, a great, strapping, lazy-looking fellow, lay rolled in his blanket, in spite of the heat, about fifty feet from the gate, apparently asleep.

There was nothing picturesque or attractive about these "denizens of the boundless prairie," as young Greene called them when he first joined. They were simply dirty, disreputable-looking idlers, a little filthier than gipsies, a little more repulsive than wild beasts. They were regular hangers-on at the *post*, begging and pilfering wherewithal

to live and get drunk, specimen types of a degraded and vanishing race.

St. Aure never noticed them any more than so many insects, and the soldiers at the post were equally careless, so blunted were their senses by familiarity and contempt.

"That must be Westbrooke's lot, Charley," said St. Aure thoughtfully, as he watched the distant cavalcade. "How many did the order say he was to bring?"

"Five companies of the Twelfth Cavalry, General," said Peyton in his low, quiet tones. "Charlton is to join Slaughter at Laramie with two of the Forty-fifth Infantry and the Gatlings."

"Ay, ay," said St. Aure, shortly, still scanning the distant column. "Where's that man of mine? Is he bringing the horse up?"

"Here he comes, General," said a young officer in second lieutenant's uniform, who stood near by in full fig. "Can't I go with you, sir?"

He was a youngster recently joined from the Academy, and rather a pet of St. Aure's.

"Yes, Darcy, yes, if you've attended to your duties," said the commandant in his absent, abrupt manner. Darcy was officer of the day, hence his full uniform.

"All right, General. Here, Tom, my horse."

General St. Aure's orderly here ran up, leading a bright sorrel thoroughbred with three white feet. St. Aure had a passion for thoroughbreds, and had nearly ruined himself many a time in buying them.

"Steady, Dandy, steady!"

The horse, fresh from the stables, was fidgetting about and unwilling to be mounted. St. Aure followed him, one foot in the stirrup, and swung into the saddle, just as the animal gave a bound, shaking his head, and started to run. His rider gathered up the reins and brought him up with a firm, low hand, sitting like a rock in the saddle.

It was a noble sight to see St. Aure on horseback, and especially when he possessed a spirited and impatient animal, as in this case. His tall figure looked as if it grew in the middle of the deep saddle, swaying to every motion of the horse, and never quitting the one point of support. His bridle-hand looked careless and loose while his horse's head was in full control; but when Dandy tried to break away from the restraint, the hand never moved from its place near the sword-belt, while the reins became like bars of iron, till the animal yielded and brought in his head, champing the bit and curvetting. The stirrups were quite long and the legs nearly straight, the feet swaying slightly with every bound of the horse.

Some men ride badly, and some ride well, but it is not every man, however well he rides, who looks well on horseback. St. Aure was one of the few exceptions. He looked magnificent—the picture of a knightly warrior of romance, unified with his fiery horse, one spirit pervading both.

Peyton and Darcy were both in their saddles as soon as their chief, but their horses were more used to work and not so full of spirits. St. Aure allowed his horse to fret for a moment, and then let the reins slip through his bridle-hand, as he closed his legs.

Away went Dandy like a shot over the plain, followed by the two officers, sabres clanking and swinging to and fro. The approaching column halted, and the bugle pealed out the rapid signal which had aroused Jim St. Aure from his peaceful work of holding worsted skeins. Then the soldiers were seen to trot out, breaking from column into a line to the front, and General St. Aure pulled Dandy back on his haunches in front of a motionless line of equestrian statues, white with dust, in front of which sat Major Westbrooke on his scraggy old brown horse, with his sabre drawn.

No sooner had St. Aure halted than the Major turned and shouted in his hoarse, deep tones:

"Draw—sabres! Present—sabres!"

A line of gleaming steel, a clatter and clash, then silence, the blades flashing in air like a wall of light.

Major Westbrooke saluted.

"Colonel St. Aure, I have the honor to report for duty. Will you ride round, sir?"

St. Aure lifted his hat.

"Just what I came for, Major."

The Major brought his men to a "carry" and "return," and then accompanied St. Aure as he rode slowly up and down the line, in front and rear.

They were a hardy, bronzed, resolute-looking set of fellows, these dragoons, with very little of the soldier in their appearance, outside of their arms. One company wore great black felt hats, another white ones, a third caps, and a fourth brown hats. Their blue blouses were uniform, but the variety of boots was as great as that of hats, some wearing knee boots, others gaiters, others trousers outside of common ankle-boots. Their horses were lightly equipped, but low in flesh, having marched four hundred and fifty miles within the last three weeks, and behind them one could see the long lines of loaded wagons, that had carried their sustenance on the way.

The officers were even less uniform than the men. There was old Groutey, in a rusty flannel sack-coat, sitting on his splendid roan horse, a heavy, wicked brute, with an eye as dangerous as his master's. His curly white hair no longer surrounded a face purple from drink. It was round and full, but rather pale than otherwise. Groutey looked stern and forbidding as ever, but he seemed to be a good soldier, judging from the neat appearance of his men behind him. On his right was the bulky figure of Cornelius Van Dyck, who, unlike his chief, had evidently been

drinking already, for his eyes were set and his face unnaturally red. Van Dyck wore a huge white hat and a suit of buckskin, while Frank Armstrong, who was on the left, was almost the only officer in line who preserved the regular undress uniform of the American army.

St. Aure nodded his head approvingly as he passed the young officer, but frowned heavily when his eyes settled on Van Dyck, who was swaying to and fro in his saddle as if about to fall.

"Major Westbrooke," he said in his clear, icy tones, "I hope your officers will understand that Fort Marengo is no place for this sort of thing. Captain"—to Groutey—"when you get into camp send that officer to report to me in arrest."

Old Groutey's face looked exceedingly sour as he answered: "Very good, sir."

Then he looked straight before him again.

St. Aure continued the inspection in silence, evidently ruffled by the incident, and presently bowed coldly to Major Westbrooke.

"Put your men into camp under the north wall, Major. It's close to water, and your firewood has been piled there by the quartermaster. I will inspect the train this afternoon, when you're in camp. Good day, sir. You will pack your sabres before you go out with us after Indians."

Two stiff bows, and the officers parted in silence, St. Aure riding slowly off.

Presently he came back, calling out in a different tone:

"Major—Major, a word with you, if you please."

Major Westbrooke rode with him to one side. The Major was evidently on his dignity, and not inclined to be at all sociable.

"Major," said St. Aure, "I hope that you and your officers will call on Mrs. St. Aure and myself on Tuesday evening. That is *our* regular reception night, and we

have a very pleasant little society here, thanks to the influence of the ladies of the post, so I hope your officers may find it as pleasant as ours do."

"Thanks, General," said Westbrooke, constrainedly. "Of course it will be our duty to call, sir."

"And pleasure, too, I hope, Westbrooke," said the other, with his genial smile. "Come, come, we are too old friends to look askance at each other about a piece of disagreeable duty. I know there are not many ladies at Napoleon. Eh, Westbrooke."

Major Westbrooke made a grimace. He was a bachelor.

"No. Slaughter says a garrison's no place for women," he said; "and I believe he's right."

"For *some* women, yes," said St. Aure. "Mrs. Slaughter might not be happy there, and Miss Fanny would certainly be disgusted at the housekeeping. But *I'll* show you a post, old fellow, where women have made us all we are of good. Will you come?"

"Yes, I will," said Westbrooke gruffly. "You always were a coaxing devil, St. Aure, when you were a cadet."

St. Aure laid his hand on the other's arm.

"Westbrooke, I've not forgotten the captain who led the troop of the Twelfth Cavalry I joined at Bull Run. You gave me my first lesson in warfare, old fellow, and I owe a good deal to you, if I *have* had better luck. You'll come, won't you?"

"Yes, Bertie, I'll come," and the Major grasped his hand kindly as they parted.

St. Aure rode back to the fort at the same reckless speed with which he had started. He always rode in the same manner, and was never known to fall unless his horse came down. He dashed in at the fort gate, nearly riding over the lazy Indian, who had before been asleep, but was *now standing in* the way as he came.

The man uttered a frightened grunt as he sprang aside, and would have been knocked down by Adjutant Peyton's horse, which was coming close behind, had not he suddenly flapped his red blanket in the animal's face with a shrill yell. The horse swerved aside, nearly unseating Peyton, and sending him against Darcy, whose leg was severely squeezed in the operation.

With an angry imprecation the young officer of the day checked his horse, rushed him at the Indian, and began to lash the savage with his whip as if he had been a dog. The Indian, lately so defiant, turned, held down his head, threw up his blanket and ran, followed by the angry officer, who was striking all the way, till the red man took refuge in the teepee, howling dismally. Then Darcy turned his horse, laughing in a triumphant tone.

"*That* buck won't try any more of his tricks to frighten horses on me, I think, Charley," he said. "I warmed his hide for him."

Peyton had dismounted, and was watching the whole performance in silence.

"You were too hard on the poor fellow," he said in his soft, thoughtful tones. "He was nearly run over, you know, and I think he threw up his arms instinctively."

"Oh, well, never mind. Those confounded bucks need a good thrashing to bring them to their level. A buck nigger and a buck Indian—I hate the dirty, greasy brutes."

Peyton smiled slightly, and then gave a little sigh as he said:

"Poor creatures! They're vanishing fast enough as it is, without being abused for it. That man you lashed was once a proud warrior."

Darcy laughed contemptuously.

"Oh, Lord, Charley, don't give us that sort of stuff, please. I used *to think* Indians were fine fellows after

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reading Cooper, but when I saw them it changed my ideas, and now I swear I hate them. They're all treacherous, dirty devils, only half a remove from beasts of the field, bucks, squaws and pickaninnies alike."

Peyton shook his head slightly.

"Does it cost any more to say 'men, women and children,' Darcy? Well, never mind. We don't agree on that topic. Coming to the reception to-night?"

"Yes, believe so."

And they parted.

CHAPTER XII.

THE COMMANDANT'S RECEPTION.

MRS. ST. AURE'S parlors were filled that evening with a very pleasant company, albeit the men were almost exclusively military. There were several ladies there, wives of the officers of the post, or friends on visits; for Fort Marengo was near a railroad, and sure to be inundated every summer by parties of pleasure-seekers, intent on buffalo.

Captain Groutey, his face positively genial for the first time in many years, sat on a sofa in a corner talking to Madam Lacy, who on her part had dropped her usual air of languid condescension, and seemed to be interested in her companion. Groutey was by no means bad looking, and that night his face was clean shaven, ruddy and frank, while his curly white hair was beautiful to see, and contrasted pleasantly with his dark eyes and eyebrows.

"It is all so new to me, Captain," the spinster was saying, "and seems to bring back the days of my girlhood so strongly, but with *such* a difference. You know my poor brother, Augustus Lacy, was in the army in those days. Ah, what a handsome fellow he was! You may remember him possibly—Major Lacy of the Ninth Dragoons. Poor fellow! He was killed at the head of his men in front of Mexico."

"Remember Gus Lacy!" echoed Groutey. (He didn't.) "Of course I do, my dear Miss Lacy. A splendid officer he was too, and a very dear friend of mine. It was 'Gus' and 'Bob' between us in those days, though I was not in his regiment, you know, but in the Maryland Volunteers."

"Indeed?" said Madam Lacy, unbending still more. "You are one of the Baltimore Grouteys then, Captain? I used to know them very well before that horrid war. But I thought they all went over to the Southern side."

"Most of them did," said Groutey, unblushingly. "You remember Jack Groutey of Oriole Plantation. He was killed at Lookout Mountain. He was my first cousin, and I was in the very charge in which we took his battery. Poor Jack!"

"Oh, of course, it was very proper in you to be on the right side," said Madam Lacy, virtuously; "but still I always pitied those high-bred Southern families. There is so little real blood in our country that we ought to save what we can of it."

Groutey studied the pattern of the carpet intently with a mournful aspect. He was an Ohio man in reality, but there were few things he did not know how to turn to his advantage.

"Very true, Miss Lacy," he observed, presently. "What with *parvenues* and *mésalliances*, our families are not what they used to be."

The old lady turned on him eagerly.

"Indeed? I am so glad to hear you express yourself in that manner, Captain, in *these* times, when even our oldest families are yielding to this levelling spirit. There is my brother Joseph, now. You wouldn't believe how carelessly that man allows his daughter—and *my* niece, Captain—to contract intimacies. There was one of those young cadets (the son of some common people out West): but because my nephew Cornelius happened to have this nobody appointed to his company, Joseph must needs invite him to our house, and send him out riding with Juliet. I do think that some men——" Here Madam Lacy pursed up her lips primly, and shook her head with a *volume of meaning*.

Groutey had been listening with his eyes on the floor.

"Is Van Dyck your nephew?" he asked, softly.

Madam Lacy started.

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"He is my lieutenant, along with Armstrong."

The old lady turned pale.

"Good gracious! and *we* here! I thought his company was down in Texas. I would never have consented to this——"

Groutey interrupted her for the first time, by laying his hand on her arm and speaking in a low tone.

"Don't fear, Miss Lacy. We of the old blood can help each other if we will. He shall never trouble you here, *I* promise you that."

Madam Lacy looked at him doubtfully.

"Ah, Captain, the days of *lettres de cachet* are passed. But if they were not—— How did these young men get here, and where are they now?"

"They came on with me, three days ago, from Napoleon, and they are both on duty to-night. Our straight-laced commander must needs order out a scouting party to-night, just as if there was not daylight enough to work in, and they both go on it. If you would honor me so far as to trust to my——"

The rest of the sentence was lost in the bustle attending the entrance of some new people, and the buzz of conversation was renewed.

Mrs. St. Aure, wearing her usual gentle smile, advanced from the middle of a group of officers to meet Adjutant Peyton, who was accompanied by a fair-haired lady, possessing a soft childish face and the large gray eyes of the St. Aures.

She was affectionately greeted as "Minnie" by the commandant's wife, and almost immediately surrounded by the younger officers of the post, with whom she seemed *to be a great favorite.*

"Now, Mrs. Peyton, we're so glad you've come. You can settle the question for us," cried one young fellow eagerly; and then the lady was surrounded and carried off to a corner, where Juliet Brinton and Nettie Dashwood were sitting in state, the recipients of universal adulation from all the eligible men in the garrison.

"Miss Brinton wants to know if ladies ever hunt with us, and she declines to believe me when I tell her it's quite common."

"Oh, yes," said the young bride, with her bright, ready smile, very much like that of her brother, the General. "Charley has taken me out after buffalo several times, when the party is large and the ground good. There was a young lady from Kentucky came out to us in the spring who actually killed three buffalo with her pistol."

Juliet Brinton gave a little shudder, but Nettie Dashwood eagerly asked: "What—really—all by herself? Oh, what fun! I'm going to kill a buffalo the very first hunt we have. See if I don't."

"If you'll only allow *me* the pleasure of taking care of you, I'll engage you shall," said young Darcy in his most engaging tones. "I assure you I'll take the best of care of you, Miss Dashwood."

"You'd better not trust him, Miss Dashwood," said Charley Peyton, who stood near his wife. "Take one of us steady old married men. We're used to taking care of ladies."

Nettie looked at him with honest admiration.

"I'd trust myself with *you* anywhere, if you would be bothered with me, and Mrs. Peyton wouldn't object," she said frankly.

"Oh, I'll trust Charley to take care of a young lady," said the wife with her bright smile. "He's just as gentle *as a lamb, my* dear; only he's so horribly prudent—he *won't let you ride* too fast."

"That's just what I should like," said Juliet Brinton, in her rich, low tones. "You'll have to lend your husband to me, Mrs. Peyton, I'm afraid, instead of Nettie."

Mrs. Peyton laughed merrily.

"There it is again, Charley. Just like the last party. I told you how it would be."

"What is it? I don't understand," said Juliet a little blankly.

Nettie Dashwood clapped her hands.

"*I* know, Jule. She means we're pulling caps for him. Well, I don't care. I like these steady old fellows. If there's anything I detest, its frivolity. Mrs. Peyton shall decide. Whom will you lend him to?"

"I think *you'll* need him most," said the bride with a proud glance at her handsome husband. "But I don't think you'd be obedient."

"No, indeed, I wouldn't," said the Dashwood in her sauciest tone. "I never promised to be *that* to any one, and I don't think I will."

"Take *me*, Miss Dashwood," said Darcey at this juncture in a pleading tone. "I'll let you race all over, and be near you like a regular slave to watch over you."

Mrs. St. Aure here joined the group.

"What are you plotting in this corner? Miss Brinton, my dear, the General says that we shall have to put off our grand party for a few days till the country has been scouted over. We must manage to be satisfied with a little coursing near the fort. Have you ever seen greyhounds coursing hares?"

"No."

"It's a pretty sight, and the General has some very fine dogs—some of them imported. Can you be satisfied with anything so tame, Miss Dashwood?"

"I suppose I must," said Nettie, pettishly. "I wish those tiresome *Indians would* leave us alone."

"So we all do, my dear," said Mrs. St. Aure, smiling; "but you must remember that soldiers are not like gentlemen at the east, able to control their own actions. Miss Brinton, could you not oblige us with a little music?"

Juliet rose obediently and moved to the piano, followed by all her train of satellites; when Jim St. Aure, who had been lounging around the room among the guests as if he felt bored, suddenly crossed the floor and sat down by Nettie. He looked at her in his odd, abrupt manner, a trait picked up from his brother, and inquired:

"Well, young lady, and how do you like it all?"

Nettie turned to him confidentially, for Jim had a fatherly sort of way with him that was taking to young girls, and he was twice Nettie's age.

"I think it's just splendid. How nice all the officers are! So kind and gallant!"

Colonel Jim smiled, and then sighed a little.

"Yes. Oh! by the by, do you know any one by the name of Armstrong?"

Nettie started almost imperceptibly, and then replied, in her eager, impulsive way:

"Yes. He's here. I saw him on horseback as we came up in the ambulance. Why is he not here to-night?"

Jim St. Aure lowered his voice.

"You look like a good, honest little girl. Can you keep a secret, and not even tell your cousin?"

"Yes," replied the girl, bravely; but Colonel Jim, watching her keenly from under his lowered eyelids, noticed that she was trembling.

"Armstrong's going out to-night on a long scout, and he gave me a letter for you," said Colonel Jim.

"You—a letter—for me?" asked the girl in great surprise. "*Why*—do *you* know him?"

"Well, after a fashion," said Jim with a sort of half smile on his face. "I don't know how it is, but all these youngsters are sure to come to Elsie, or Minnie, or me with their love affairs, and I seem to get all the hopeless cases."

"But I don't understand," said Nettie, a little bewildered. "Mr. Armstrong's not in love with me, Colonel St. Aure."

The officer smiled.

"Oh, no. Any one could see that with half an eye. But he thinks you're his friend, Miss Nettie."

"Indeed, I am," said the girl, earnestly.

"So I see," answered Jim St. Aure, with a little twist of his mouth; "but you know who he is in love with. Never mind—I don't want to know—I think I do—but the long and short of it is this: he's a young officer and on his first scout; and he feels pretty nervous about never coming back. They all do at first, when they're new to it. Bless your soul, he'll be back in a week, safe and sound. Don't look so scared."

Nettie had turned very white, and seemed to be choking down something in her throat. Jim St. Aure looked at her very keenly for a moment, and then changed his tone of soothing encouragement to one of severe reproof.

"I'm disappointed in you, little girl. All the old women in the garrison will be looking at you in a moment. Keep a stiff upper lip, if he is your friend. How can I tell you what he said, if you don't listen quietly?"

Nettie gave a little gulp, and turned to him with a grateful look in her blue eyes.

"Thank you," she said, sweetly. "Scold me again; it helps me, just now. Go on, and be quick. Juliet will be through with her piece in a minute. What else did he say?"

"He told *me that he had* a very stanch friend, a lady,

and that this lady had helped him through thick and thin in his love affair with another lady, and that he had heard from Darcy over there that both these ladies were invited to the fort by my brother. Of course I knew who they were, then, and when he asked me to take charge of a letter to give to you, I consented."

"Where's the letter?" asked Nettie, in a low tone.

"Here," said Jim, looking away round the room, as he slipped a small package along the sofa under the fold of the girl's skirt. "Mind you, don't be scared at the superscription. These youngsters always make their wills when they go out, while we old fellows get over the habit as we harden."

Nettie covered the letter with her handkerchief and fan with all her old dexterity, and conveyed it away to the mysterious recesses of her white dress as she looked smilingly round the room.

The music was over for the moment, and Juliet was surrounded by officers begging for more. Nettie glanced over into the back parlor, where Judge Brinton, with the jolly wife of the post-surgeon for a partner, was playing a solemn game of whist against Captain Groutey and Madam Lacy.

Then the music began again, as Juliet dashed into a brilliant polonaise of Schubert's, and the girl on the sofa spoke under her breath to Jim St. Aure, with a tone of anxiety.

"What does it say outside, Colonel St. Aure? Please tell me; I'll be good. I daren't look now."

"It says, 'Not to be opened until my death or capture by Indians,'" said Jim St. Aure, lightly. "That's what they all write. When he gets back, he'll feel deucedly ashamed of himself for being so spooney over a trifle."

"When will he be back, if—if at all?" said Nettie, *quietly.*

"In about three weeks. It may take him six, but that's only if he has to come back another way."

"Are there many—many Indians about?" asked the girl in the same low tone, still staring over at the group by the piano.

"Well, I can hardly say. That's the object of the scout, to ascertain if there *are* any Indians in this part of the country. But he goes in good company. His first lieutenant, Van Dyck, is with him, and quite a strong party, with several Indian scouts. Van Dyck's been on the plains two years, you know."

"Yes, but I don't trust him," said Nettie, positively. "He's not a West Pointer, you know."

Colonel Jim smiled.

"No more am I. No more are half the best officers we have."

Nettie opened her eyes.

"Why, I thought—I thought they almost all had to go through the Academy to make them into real soldiers—I mean—I beg your pardon—I——"

Colonel Jim laughed outright.

"Don't apologize. A good many people think that. But the fact is, West Point doesn't make them into soldiers at all. It only makes them fit to become soldiers in short order. Don't think I'm envious, Miss Nettie. My brother is a graduate, and I consider him the best officer I ever knew; but it is quite possible to make a good officer without taking a cadet."

"And what sort of officer does Con make?" asked the girl, curiously.

Colonel Jim shut up instantly. It was one of the traits of the St. Aures to speak no ill of their fellow officers.

"I should say pretty good," he answered. "This is his third year, and one soon learns Indian tricks here.

Aha! I see they're to have a dance; Elsie's going to the piano. Sorry I can't ask you, but I confess I hate dancing. Here's Darcy and Greene, and the whole crowd of them. Good-by."

And Colonel Jim stalked away, walking very much like his brother, whom he copied closely on all occasions.

A few moments after, Nettie Dashwood was whirling away round the parlor, the gayest of the gay, and young Darcy was whispering all the sentimental nonsense he could think of into her ears. As for Juliet Brinton, she beamed impartially on captain, major and lieutenant. She was in clover, as far as partners were concerned.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SCOUTING PARTY.

OUTSIDE the commandant's house that evening the scene was a great contrast to the bright, happy groups in the parlor. The enclosure of the parade ground was deserted and silent, for it was long after taps and the new moon had set, while the men were quiet in their quarters. The commandant's house was brightly illuminated, and lights burned in several of the officers' cottages; but the barracks were dark and still, and the commissary buildings were closed for the night.

Down in the extreme corner of the post, where the guard-house was located, a single twinkling light gleamed from afar like a star, and a person standing on the piazza of the commandant's quarters might have noticed what seemed to be a red spark of fire moving about near it. Had this person been moved by sufficient curiosity to bring out an opera-glass and watch this spark, he might have discovered that it was a small red lantern in the hands of a man on foot, who was moving about; and a visit to the spot would have revealed something else.

Down by the guard-house, some thirty or forty troopers were gathered into a long line, each man standing by the head of his horse, while Colonel St. Aure, lantern in hand, was moving about among them, narrowly examining every man's appearance. The commandant said very little, and his face wore a thoughtful expression, as he strode around, snapping his fingers and whistling softly under his breath as he passed along the line. Following him at a little

distance were Van Dyck and Armstrong, the latter the only person present wearing his sabre. The men carried their carbines in their hands, and each had a pair of revolvers slung behind his hips, but there was an entire absence of the usual clatter and jingle, characteristic of cavalry.

At last St. Aure stopped at the left of the line. One might see by the light of the lantern that the faces of some of the troopers who were on the left were very dark, and at first might have taken them for negro troops. A second glance revealed a difference in contour, a hard, stolid expression, such as a negro never wears; and several of the men were out of regular uniform, with streaks of paint on their swarthy faces. They were, in fact, Indian scouts, regularly enlisted and uniformed by the Government.

St. Aure turned abruptly away and walked out of earshot, as soon as he had finished his inspection. He was followed by the two officers, Armstrong's sabre, which he carried hooked up, clinking slightly against the rings of the hangers as he walked.

When they were at a little distance from the party, St. Aure stopped and turned abruptly to Armstrong, saying:

"You'd better leave that sabre in your quarters, sir. It makes too much noise, it's always in the way, and it's no use in Indian fighting or scouting."

Armstrong looked mortified and drew back, but St. Aure added, more kindly:

"It's a way we have in the Twelfth, Mr. Armstrong. All people don't agree on the point, but I prefer it. You'll be in time, sir, if you'll ride over."

Armstrong bowed and brightened up. He went back to where an orderly was holding his horse in the gloom that covered the fort, mounted, and galloped off toward *the officers'* quarters, clattering all the way. Then St.

Aure addressed Van Dyck, as soon as the other was fairly gone.

"Mr. Van Dyck, I am going to speak frankly to you, partly as a commanding officer, but principally as a friend, if you will allow me. Remember that I consider it the duty of a colonel to act as a father to all his young officers, whatever their faults. Will you allow me to speak as a friend, sir?"

Van Dyck colored and stammered:

"Certainly, General—I hope you don't think——"

St. Aure stopped him.

"No, I don't think you incorrigible—no young man is—but I think you are in a dangerous state. Mr. Van Dyck, you come of a wealthy family, and follow a fashion which is becoming too prevalent. It was only three days ago when you allowed yourself to be seen in a state which brought you under arrest, and might have cost you your commission had I been a different man."

Van Dyck said nothing, but his face assumed an expression of sullen displeasure, which St. Aure instantly noted.

"Don't misunderstand me, sir," he said. "That offence is past and gone. I have released you from arrest and put you on duty on purpose to give you a chance to do better. I know the temptations that assail young officers, for I was once young myself, and I owe my present safety to the efforts of a good woman. But, Mr. Van Dyck, I want you to promise me, sir, on your word as a gentleman, that you will not touch a drop of intoxicating liquor while you are on this expedition. Will you do it, sir?"

Van Dyck looked more sullen than ever.

"I don't think you have any right to suppose that I shall neglect important duty, General, because I happened once on a time to be a little—well, a little under the weather. I *was sick that* morning, but of course it was

not my place to argue with the commanding officer. I shall do my duty on this scouting expedition, as I have done it before. General Slaughter never found any fault with me."

St. Aure said no more, but looked at him a moment in a doubtful manner, with his peculiar thoughtful frown. Then he turned abruptly away, just as Armstrong galloped up and jumped off his horse beside them.

"Very good, Mr. Armstrong," he said, briskly. "Now you look more like an Indian fighter, silent and dangerous. Gentlemen, I have but a few words to say; the Adjutant has given you the orders, I presume, in writing. Follow them to the letter. You are to scout the whole country in a circle as far as Antelope River, and report if you find any and what kind of trails. You are not to fight unless attacked, but travel by night when you can, and act as much like Indians on the warpath as possible. You are sent to find out what is going on among the tribes, if you can do it by any means. That is all."

"May I ask a question, General?" said Armstrong, in a timid voice.

St. Aure's stern, thoughtful face softened as he answered:

"Certainly, sir."

"If either of us sees a chance to find out something of importance by a risk outside of written orders, is he at liberty to take the risk?"

St. Aure held up the lantern a moment and looked full in the speaker's face with a stare of peculiar sternness. Armstrong never winked, and the two confronted each other for nearly half a minute in dead silence. Then St. Aure made one of his peculiar grimaces, and turned to Van Dyck without vouchsafing any answer. He spoke in a sharp, business-like way.

"*Mr. Van Dyck*, you'll remember that Red Arrow is

the best trailer of your party. You must be a little careful about those scouts, sir. Remember that they are very sensitive to insult, but also very apt to impose on good nature. They need the iron hand in the silk glove. I don't think you'll have any trouble, however, as there is no whiskey along. Good-by, sir, and luck go with you. You ought to reach the river by Sunday at latest."

Van Dyck touched his cap and turned away to his horse, when St. Aure suddenly walked over to Armstrong, in his eccentric fashion, again lifted the lantern and stared in the young officer's face for several seconds in silence. Then, with the same peculiar manner that marked all his doings, he shifted the lantern to his left hand, held out his right and shook that of Armstrong with great warmth.

"God bless you, Armstrong," he said. "Follow your fortune, my boy, and you'll be a credit to the old Bell-buttons. Good-by, my dear lad, good-by."

The tears rushed into the eyes of the junior at this warm greeting, and he could hardly stammer:

"Good-by, General. Thank you, sir."

Then St. Aure wheeled round and strode off, snapping his fingers at every step and whistling softly to himself, till he reached the boarded sidewalk that ran round the fort, when he paused to look at the scouting party.

"Prepare to mount!" rang out the hoarse voice of Van Dyck from where he sat on his horse in front of the groups of dismounted men. There was a rustle and muffled tramping on the soft earth as the line broke up into individual men, standing beside their saddles, foot in stirrup.

"Mount! Form—ranks! Fours right—march!"

The men rose into the air like one machine, moved by the same impulse, and the little troop of horsemen moved silently off into *the night* to be swallowed up in the dark-

ness of the plain outside, for the sky was overcast with a great cloud, which had been approaching unobserved all the evening from the north-west. St. Aure stood a moment and listened to the slowly retreating hoofs, and then proceeded slowly to his house, which he entered just as the music was at its gayest and the hall filling with the overflow of officers who could not find partners.

The sight of St. Aure in his undress sack-coat excited no astonishment, for the officers knew on what duty he had been engaged; and the commandant proceeded to his dressing-room upstairs without disturbing the festivities. When he came down, in full uniform, one could hardly find a handsomer figure, with its peculiar knightly grace of appearance, set off by the gold cord looped up on the breast, and by the great knot and tassels of bullion that hung from a button on the left side. His face had entirely lost its thoughtful expression, and beamed with boyish, light-hearted gayety, while the ladies all clustered round him as soon as he appeared; for it was evident that he was a great favorite with them, and by no means an object of awe. The ladies of the garrison made no inquiries as to the reason of his absence, but the visitors, innocent of military etiquette, were not so scrupulous. One little girl of fourteen, a slip of a thing from school, enjoying her vacation at Marengo under Mrs. St. Aure's wing, because she was Darcy's sister, rushed at the General, crying:

"Oh, General, where *have* you been? We were all wishing for you just now. Maurice says we're to have some private theatricals next week, and I'm to act. Won't it be fun?"

"With all my heart, Fanny. You shall be the 'Little Treasure,' and I'll play the heavy father."

"Oh, no! You must be 'Captain Walter Mayden-

blush.' You'll be so funny in that character, you know. I can't fancy *you* as a heavy father."

St. Aure laughed aloud in his hearty way.

"Agreed, Fan; and now let's have a dance. I'm not twenty-five yet, you know, and a Virginia reel would suit me immensely."

A few minutes later the stern-looking chief of the dark night outside had vanished as if for ever, to be replaced by a regular schoolboy, frolicking about the room and making a romp of the reel, which was formed in short order. Every one danced, soldier and citizen alike. Even Judge Brinton took off his gold-rimmed glasses, laid aside his half-played hand, and joined in the reel with elephantine playfulness. How they all danced that night! Mrs. St. Aure, her sweet serious look replaced by gusts of irresistible merriment, figured in the row of ladies opposite to Major Westbrooke, whose rugged face was beaming with unaccustomed smiles. Juliet Brinton, with Captain Burke for a partner, was at the head, and the General at the foot with Fanny Darcy, while Jim St. Aure had picked up the jolly Surgeon's wife and was grinning at his brother's antics. There was no order in that dance, while General St. Aure was around. He executed the most original steps opposite to Juliet Brinton, grimacing till he got her laughing so that she forgot the figure, and then he mixed up all the couples by calling out wrong directions, ending by chasséing round the room with two partners, followed by his brother with some else beside his own, so that the dance broke up in romping disorder, as Mrs. Peyton, who sat at the piano conniving at the spirit of misrule, changed from "Money Musk" to the "Champagne Galop." There was young Maurice Darcy in his element as he carried Nettie Dashwood round the room at full speed, and she seemed to join in the sport with perfect readiness,

albeit she looked a little pale and thoughtful a minute before. After that galop there was no intermission to the gayety, as long as Mrs. Peyton would play; and General St. Aure was the soul of everything and the youngest looking man in all the crowd.

Captain Groutey and Madam Lacy were the only people who did not seem to enjoy themselves. The white-headed Captain sat on a sofa with the old lady, a sarcastic grin on his face, watching St. Aure.

"Quite a dignified Colonel we have," he remarked in his smoothest tones, as the General passed them in a wild galop with the Surgeon's wife.

Madam Lacy pursed up her lips, and raising her double glasses, surveyed the scene with languid wonder.

"I wonder if they call that proper behavior for ladies and gentlemen?" she observed in her most languid drawl. "I suppose it's Western manners."

Groutey sneered openly and bitterly.

"What can one expect? The Academy doesn't always turn out gentlemen. Scratch them, and you find the country lout underneath."

Then there came a sudden bluish glare of light into the room, paling the numerous lamps with its brilliancy, followed by a deafening crash overhead that shook the house to its foundation, stopping music and dancers at once with the shock. Every one started and hushed instictively, to look through the open windows, when in came a great gust of wind and dust, blowing out half the lights, and the next moment they heard the rain coming down in torrents outside. Nettie Dashwood started and turned deadly pale, uttering a slight scream, while Darcy, by no means loth to do the consolation business, supported her and begged her not to be alarmed—"it was only a thunder-storm."

"*We're lucky*, some of us, not to be out in it," said the

young man gayly. "If it had not been for the arrival of the new battalions, I might have been caught on scouting duty myself. As it is, the new officers will have to take it. They'll get the thick of it in about five minutes, I should say."

The bustle of shutting windows covered the agitation of the girl's voice as she inquired:

"Are these storms dangerous on the plains, Mr. Darcy? Do people ever—get struck?"

"Not that ever I heard of. The worst danger is getting caught in a dry river bottom. Those places fill up very suddenly. I remember once, when the General was away, Mrs. St. Aure nearly got drowned in her own tent after such a storm. But that scouting party's safe enough, with Red Arrow to pilot them. He's about the best guide on the plains."

"Is he?" said Nettie wistfully.

Darcy looked at her and smiled.

"Why, Miss Dashwood, what a tender-hearted creature you are! Those fellows out there don't mind a little rain. Do you know the officers?"

"Yes. One of them is my cousin," said Nettie, in a hurried tone, and coloring deeply. "You're *sure* there's no danger."

"Not in the least," said Darcy; and then for some reason he grew silent, and soon after escorted her to a seat and left her, while he strolled off.

For about ten minutes the thunder and lightning were incessant, and made so much disturbance that the dancing ceased as if by common consent, while the people conversed in low tones. Darcy went out into the passage and stood leaning against the wall, frowning thoughtfully to himself. Presently the thunder ceased; and when it began again, it was at intervals, and more and more distant, while the dropping of rain on the *roof of* the piazza became less and less

frequent, and finally stopped altogether. Then Darcy walked to the door, opened it, and went out on the piazza, just as the people inside began to open the windows again. The great black cloud was passing away to the south, and the stars were shining along its northern edge. The storm, rapid and vehement, like all plains storms, had passed away as quickly as it had come, leaving the air cool and pleasant. And then Maurice Darcy began to talk to himself, a very bad habit he had.

"By Jove, it's that drunken brute, Van Dyck! I think that girl must be crazy to see anything in *him.*"

He remained watching the cloud some time, and looking moody and discontented. At last he suddenly left the piazza without his hat, and started off down the walk that bordered the officers' quarters, toward his own house. He had not gone far, before a dark crouching figure started up from behind one of the houses, and took one or two steps forward as if to follow him, as noiselessly as a cat.

The young officer moved on, with his hands in his pockets, looking down at the ground, and evidently buried in deep thought, by no means pleasant. The dark figure stopped by the edge of the plank walk. Feathers were on its head and its body seemed to be nearly naked, but with both hands it was drawing a bow.

Suddenly came a voice from the piazza, that of Jim St. Aure, shouting:

"Look out, *Darcy!*"

Twang! went the bow, just as the young officer started to one side with an instinctive motion.

Thud!

Darcy uttered a sharp cry of pain and anger, Jim St. Aure came running down the steps with a clash of spurs, and the dark figure vanished behind the house. But Jim never followed, though he saw it running away. He was *out beside* Darcy in a flash.

"Hurt much? No, I see—arm. Run to your quarters. Don't alarm the women folks. Send your man for the doctor. I'll fix that fellow for you."

Then Colonel Jim was running like a deer across the muddy pools of the parade ground straight for the guard-house, into which he bolted, breathless.

"Get the guard out, sergeant. One of those bucks has sent an arrow through Mr. Darcy. He'll come back to his teepee. Seize all the Indians outside, and bring them in. Watch for him."

The sergeant hesitated a moment.

"The officer of the guard, sir——"

"Isn't here. Well, I take the responsibility, sergeant, and hold you harmless. Come along."

Without further palaver, the guard turned out, and ran at speed toward the place where the Indian tepee had stood that very evening, at retreat. It was empty and silent, the fire extinct in the midst, and not a sign of human beings near it.

Colonel Jim whistled.

"Sergeant," he said, "we've been fooled badly. But the sentries may stop him."

Crack!

A rifle shot from the opposite side of the enclosure of the fort; then dead silence, followed by the cry, repeated from man to man:

"*Corporal of the guard, Number Eight.*"

"Behind the stables! By Jove, he's off!" said Colonel Jim in a tone of resignation. "It serves me right for playing officer of the day. Who's on to-night, sergeant?"

"Mr. Greene's officer of the guard, sir. Here he comes."

Up came young Greene, the junior of Burke's company, in a tearing passion.

"What *are you doing* out here, sergeant? Didn't you

hear that shot by the stables? What's the guard doing out here? Who the devil dared to order it out in my absence?"

"I did, Mr. Greene," said Colonel Jim, gravely, as he stepped forward. "It was a case for haste. The sergeant's not to blame."

Mr. Greene cooled down considerably when he found it was the General's brother before him, and the party adjourned to the guard-house to await the report of the corporal, who came in, a moment later.

"An Indian ran the guard at No. 8, sir. Sentry missed him, but no harm done."

The report was hardly finished when in rushed Captain Burke, who was officer of the day. He had heard the shot from the dancing room, and came over bareheaded to find out what was the matter.

"The women didn't hear it, and I'm thankful for it," said the Irishman, when he had heard the story. "It's that same thief Tatonka that was into it, I'll go bail. They tould me Darcy larruped him like blazes, the day we came in, and now he's off to the hostiles. Colonel Jim, they're a dirty set, those bucks, and I believe we'll never have peace and quiet on the plains till we kill every mother's son of them."

Colonel Jim laughed.

"Easy talking, Burke. Well, we can't follow the trail to-night, so I guess we'd better go and see Darcy. By Jove, it was lucky I came out on the steps to see if it had cleared up. He would have got that arrow in his back, instead of his arm, if he had not started at my shout. I saw the brute getting ready, and it flashed on me in a moment who it was."

They walked slowly along toward Darcy's quarters, and found Dr. Yunger inside. He reported only a flesh wound *from a hunting* arrow, and the patient likely to recover soon.

"I tell ye, Colonel Jim, we won't get through this summer without a fight," said Burke. "The Indians are pretty bold, but I never saw them dare to enter a fort before. Mark my words, there's trouble coming."

"The principal thing now," said Colonel Jim, "is to hide it from the women folks."

And they walked back to the commandant's house, where the dancing was getting wilder than ever.

CHAPTER XIV.

RED ARROW.

OUT in the midst of a desolate, arid country, tufted with bunches of brown grass, a compact little body of horsemen rode in a north-westerly direction. They looked travel-worn and weary, their horses low in flesh, the men dusty and sullen. The country around them was bare and dried up, with strange, fantastically shaped knolls at intervals, rising from the plain and seeming as if they had been cut by artificial means. These knolls were conical in shape, very steep, gray or yellow, but topped with a stratum of red shale, the color of a newly burned brick. In some cases the whole mass of the hill was composed of this red material, and thus every variety of color was presented in the landscape, between bluish gray, yellow and red—all but green.

Not a tree in sight—nothing but these weird hills, trembling in the streams of hot air that rose from the scorching plain in the August sun. It seemed to be a country abandoned by God and man alike, as unfit for habitation.

Far ahead of this little body of horsemen were scattered three scouts, riding about half a mile apart and appearing at intervals from behind the conical hills. The party itself was following a well defined trail in the dry soil, that looked as if a light buggy with very narrow wheels, but heavily loaded, had traversed the road before them; for deep, narrow scratches, about three feet apart, *were to be seen* seaming the ground ahead of them and fol-

lowing the easiest grades to be found. Far in the rear of the party, to the south, were two strangely-shaped eminences with perpendicular sides and perfectly flat tops, already blue in the distance.

Presently the track of which we have spoken led up a narrow valley bordered with the same character of bluffs, horizontally seamed with gray, yellow and red, but parted in the middle by a sharp-cut, intensely black line.

"Why, that's coal, isn't it, Van?" said young Armstrong, who rode at the head of the little column beside his first officer. His horse seemed to be the freshest in the party, thin as a rail, but still nervous and full of fire, the desert blood in its veins asserting its superiority in this time of trial.

"Of course it is," said Van Dyck, sulkily. "We are near the top of the divide now, Red Arrow says. I wish the cursed country was at the devil, and we safe back. We'll follow this trail too long, I'm afraid."

"But after all, there's a stirring romance in the notion that here we are in a country very few white men have ever seen," said Armstrong, eagerly; "and depending on our own wits to cheat the best warriors of the Sioux. I declare, Van, I wouldn't change with the men we left behind for a good deal. See what a chance for distinction we have if we find out where this trail leads."

"We've exceeded our orders now to follow it," said Van Dyck in the same sulky tone; "and I'm by no means satisfied that we won't be reprimanded for it. I'm sorry I yielded to you in the matter."

"Well, I'll not ask you to go a step further if we don't find something before night," said Armstrong, in a pleading tone. "Remember that there's not much danger on an old lodge-pole trail like this, unless—ha! I thought so—they've found something at last."

He *pointed ahead* of them, where one of the Indian

scouts was seen galloping his horse back to them, waving his blanket in a peculiar way. The effect on the whole party was instantaneous. The soldiers, who had been nodding sleepily in their saddles, straightened up; and every man looked eagerly forward at the approaching scout as they rode to meet him. Even Van Dyck lost his sullen look and seemed to be interested and excited.

Up came the Indian, a stolid, iron-featured fellow, dressed in a queer medley of civilized uniform and savagery. His head was covered with a steeple-crowned hat of the regular old Puritan style, with three or four bright feathers and some brass ornaments stuck into it. His bronzed body was naked to the waist, but he wore a pair of army blue trousers, from which he had carefully cut out all except the legs and a strap up to each hip, supplying the omission with a dingy gray strip of blanket tucked into his belt, while his feet and legs were protected by blanket leggings of green and stout moccasins, and his scarlet blanket hung loosely over the pommel of his saddle in front. He carried a Winchester rifle in his hand, and no less than four revolvers, all rusty and dirty, in his belt.

As he came up, this wild-looking figure halted a little way off and beckoned to Van Dyck, who halted his party and went forward to meet the scout, accompanied by Armstrong.

"Well, Red Arrow, what have you found?" asked the officer.

"New trail—American horse—mules—white man—citizen—last night," said the Indian, in his guttural tones, using such nouns as he had picked up around Marengo, and eking out the absence of verbs by gesticulation.

Van Dyck uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"A white man here! How do you know?"

The scout allowed an expression of disdain to cross his *swarthy features.*

"Me know—horse-shoes," was all he deigned to reply.

Van Dyck looked much disturbed.

"I wonder what we'd better do, Armstrong? Follow the trail, or go back?"

Armstrong looked at him a moment, and a faint smile crossed his face. Van Dyck was his senior officer by two years, but out in the desert the strongest mind comes to the top, and Armstrong had made the discovery within a day or two that his superior officer was prone to shift with every wind, and that his own resolution, if firmly maintained, was sure to prevail in a contest of opinions.

"I should say it was our plain duty to follow the trail and find who these people are," he said. "They may be Indian traders."

Van Dyck looked still more nervous.

"If they are, we're in a bad scrape, for they'll do anything to cover up their tracks. It's not our duty to run into needless danger, and I shall not allow it, sir. I command this party."

Armstrong made no reply, but spoke to the Indian.

"How far off is this party? When can we reach them if we push on fast?"

Red Arrow looked up at the sun and then round at the horizon. He seemed puzzled to find a word.

"Mebbe two—tree—forty 'leven—dunno."

"Could we catch them before sunset?" asked the officer, changing his mode of questioning.

Red Arrow nodded. He could understand that.

"Sun—so high," he said.

And he pointed to the south-west, where the sun would stand in the middle of the afternoon.

"Will you give me permission, Mr. Van Dyck," said Armstrong, formally, "to accompany the scouts on this trail alone, if you do not think it wise to take the party?

I can reconnoitre these strangers with the help of the Indians, and report to you on my return."

Van Dyck looked immensely relieved.

"Certainly, sir. The resolution is very commendable in you. We have proceeded far enough in this direction any way, and I am responsible for the safe return of the party. I shall go back to the river and halt there to recruit the horses."

Armstrong nodded, and felt a glow of exultation in his heart at the thought of untrammelled freedom of action, for Van Dyck's caution had been a drag on his impatient ardor all through the journey.

"Very good, sir. I will follow the trail with Red Arrow and report to you within three days at the old stockade by the mouth of Hominy Creek, if you wish. The best grass we found was there, and game's plenty."

"Exactly—the very place," said Van Dyck, hurriedly. "I'll wait three days for you, Armstrong, old fellow; but after that you must look out for yourself, for I shall start for Marengo. All fair, you know, in love and war. I can't compromise the safety of a party like this for a mere matter of curiosity."

Armstrong looked grave.

"I hardly know what you mean, Mr. Van Dyck. I imagine that this is a matter of duty more than curiosity. If you don't choose to wait for me, I can follow the back trail to the fort, but I assure you that if I see an opportunity to gain valuable news for General St. Aure, I shall keep on, if I have to return alone."

Van Dyck did not meet the frank, honest eyes of his subordinate, as he answered, hurriedly:

"Oh, very well, very well, sir; I don't wish to trammel you with orders, but at the same time, I must take care of myself and my party. I shall stay at the stockade till the *night* after to-morrow night, and then push for Marengo.

We shall be lucky if we get there after toiling through this God-forsaken place on a wild-goose chase."

Armstrong laughed bitterly.

"A lodge-pole trail's not much of a wild-goose chase. Heaven knows it's plain enough for me to read, and I don't profess to be anything but a greenhorn. However, have your own way, Van. I might have expected a little more help from a brother officer in my own company——"

"And having the same friends," said Van Dyck, in a low, sneering tone, with a coarse chuckle. "Put that in, Armstrong. Oh, I'm not such a fool as you think, old fellow, and I've been made a cat's paw long enough for you. Go ahead. *I* shan't take pains to keep you from losing your scalp."

Out in the desert and far from the conventional restraints of society, men are apt to drop the mask of civility and come out in their true colors. Till that moment, Van Dyck had never alluded to the rivalry between himself and Armstrong, though both knew that it existed. The younger officer threw up his head with a scornful smile.

"Oh! is *that* your game? Well, be it so. I warn you, Van Dyck, I'll get back to Marengo and be thanked in orders."

"Perhaps," said the other, with an ugly smile; and so the two men parted out in the wilderness, Van Dyck returning to his column, Armstrong riding away with the Indian scout at a slow pace.

"Follow your master with his traps," said Van Dyck shortly to his brother officer's orderly, who was leading a pack mule in the rear of the little column. The man started and looked surprised, but pushed on at a trot, and soon reached Armstrong, who was talking earnestly to the Indian. The young officer turned his head at the noise of hoofs, and saw the man, a simple Irish recruit.

"Go back, Patsey," said the Lieutenant kindly. "I shall not want you on this scout. Give my compliments to Mr. Van Dyck, and say that I hope he will allow you to accompany his party back to Marengo, if I don't return in the stipulated time. "You understand?"

"Yes, sur. But—what'll yer honor be doin' wid no blankets and no dinner, sur, and no one to rub down Bay Logan at night, sur?"

"I'll attend to Bay Logan myself, and I've a blanket on the saddle, Patsey," replied Armstrong, laughing. "As for dinner, if Red Arrow and I can't find one, it'll be our own fault. Go back and do as I told you."

Patsey made no further remonstrance, but turned back to follow the party under Van Dyck, which was already on the back trail and moving off at a fast walk. Armstrong gave a little sigh as he saw the faithful fellow join the column, and then he turned to Red Arrow.

"Now, chief, we can go on."

Red Arrow allowed a grim smile to cross his dark features as he answered:

"Good! White sojer all same Injun—no 'fraid. Red Arrow take him troo. Good!"

Armstrong smiled back as he said:

"General St. Aure told me to trust to you."

Red Arrow straightened up proudly in his saddle.

"Gin'ral big chief—great heap dam big chief—allers take Red Arrow—great chief too—me dam big chief too."

And he swelled up like a turkey cock with vanity.

Armstrong was a pretty quick observer, and he had not made the march from Napoleon to Marengo without closely observing Indian character on the way.

"The General told me that you were the best scout he ever saw, Red Arrow," he said; "and that he would trust himself alone with you in the middle of the Sioux at any *time.*"

Red Arrow turned round on Armstrong as they rode side by side, and his dark face positively radiated with pleasure as he put out his hand.

"How! Lootner, how!" he exclaimed delightedly. Shake um, shake um!"

Armstrong grasped the proffered hand warmly, for he saw he had gained the Indian's heart by the appeal to his vanity; so he continued:

"Remember this, Red Arrow, that I trust to you to guide me safe back to the General. It is probable that we shall not see Mr. Van Dyck again till we get back. Are you afraid to take me inside the Sioux camp if necessary?"

Red Arrow laughed aloud as he said boastingly:

"Sioux dam fool. Red Arrow take you into medicine tepee, you say so."

Armstrong was silent, but he felt that he had gained the love and fidelity of the Pawnee, and that all the Indian knew was at his service. By this time, as they rode slowly along, they had quite lost all sight of Lieutenant Van Dyck's party, hidden by the conical knolls, and were all alone in the dry valley with the lodge-pole trail that told where several Indian households had been moving their belongings on *travois* some days previous. Armstrong already knew that the narrow tracks cut in the dust before him were made by the end of the trailing poles supported at one end over a pony's saddle, on which the Indian packs his baggage and children when he moves house. He also knew that it was an old trail, whereon no danger was apprehended. As he thought of the weary tramp they had made, following this trail from the river, a hundred miles back, he began to be eager for some change in the monotony, and asked Red Arrow:

"Where does the new trail come in?"

Red Arrow pointed ahead to where another scout was riding in from the right to the main trail. Armstrong saw this scout pause and stoop from his horse's back to examine something on the ground, and he knew the fresh trail must be there. They rode slowly on for about a quarter of a mile, and found that the tracks of several animals were indeed visible. There were the hoof-prints of two horses, shod, with large feet, and two mule tracks, also of shod animals. All the marks continued to the lodge-pole trail in which they were, and then went on.

"What do you suppose these fellows are?" asked the young officer of the second scout, who was examining the trail as they came up.

The Indian, an Apache from the south-west who had come up with Westbrooke from Napoleon, shook his head as he answered in Spanish:

"No sé, señor."

"And what do *you* think they are, Red Arrow?"

"Mebbe so we find out bimeby, Lootner," responded the Pawnee cautiously. He always addressed Armstrong with punctilious respect as "lootner," the nearest he could get to "lieutenant."

The three horsemen now took up the line of the trail at a trot, and soon reached a place where the merest novice could recognize that the country was changing in character. Looking back, they could see the desolate "bad lands" falling away below them on a decided slope to the blue outlines of the distant buttes that stood like sentinels on the horizon. Before them the country stretched out, sandy and desolate, covered with brown tufts of cactus, but smooth and practicable, to a blue line of rolling hills in the distance; and a white gleam far below, bordered by the dark lines of a forest, told of a river. They were on the summit of the divide.

They found the third Indian scout waiting for them

there, and as he was a Pawnee who could speak hardly any English, this man entered into an animated conversation with Red Arrow, pointing to the country ahead as he spoke.

"He say white man gone into camp at water, Lootner," said Red Arrow presently. "No cover—must wait for night."

The Indian nodded eagerly and pointed to the distant line of dark woods and water, apparently about ten miles off.

"Smoke," he said sententiously.

Armstrong could see nothing till he used his field glass, and by sweeping it to and fro across the line of dark forest at last detected what the keen eye of the Indian had seen unassisted long before, a faint bluish curl of smoke.

"Do you think that is a white man's fire?" he asked of Red Arrow, to which the Indian unhesitatingly answered that it was.

"Then we will ride straight toward it," said Armstrong firmly. "If they are honest men, they will not fear us; if they are rogues, we are man to man, and don't fear them. Come, Red Arrow."

And the little party rode off at a lively trot toward the distant river.

CHAPTER XV.

THE "SPECIAL."

THE smoke that had excited the caution of the Indian scout proceeded from a tiny fire of sticks at the edge of a cedar wood, near which grazed, in the midst of a meadow teeming with the most luxuriant grasses, the two horses and two mules whose track Red Arrow had followed. The horses were very fine animals, of the kind known as half-breeds between the Indian pony and the large American horse, sold by hundreds in Texas and Mexico. The mules were also powerful animals, large and shapely. All the beasts were low in flesh, as if they had been on a long journey, and one of the mules had a bad sore back. They were munching away at the fresh, succulent herbage, anxious to make up for their long abstinence, and certainly their lines seemed to have fallen into pleasant places for the time.

They were at the edge of the Valley of the Yellowstone, and before them flowed the river, brimful and at least a thousand feet wide, running between meadows of the most vivid green, the grass springing rankly from the jet-black soil. These meadows stretched out, nearly level, for a full mile on each side, ending in perpendicular bluffs of sandstone, shale, coal, and clay, stratified in blue, red, yellow, and black, like all the hills in that weird country.

The foot of the bluffs on each side was hidden by a dense forest of cedar and pine, and it was at the edge of one of these forests that the fire was lighted, and three men sat over it talking.

Beside them lay their deep California saddles, so universal on the plains, and one Mexican pack-saddle, while two rifles rested against the pile of horse-furniture. One of the men by the fire was our old friend Mark Meagher, special correspondent for the *Tabard*, and out on a wild-goose chase after a mythical Indian council. Mark had not changed a particle, except that his freckled, close-shaven face, with its big nose and light gray eyes, was nearly of one color now, from exposure to the sun, and that his blue flannel suit was replaced by a black coat, coming down to his heels and buttoned to the throat, while his old belt, with the revolvers, had vanished, and his white hat was exchanged for the black *barreta* of a Roman priest. Thus transmogrified, Mark looked by no means unlike an energetic young Jesuit, full of zeal for the conversion of the heathen.

His companions were very different. There was no mistaking their character: they were plainsmen both. One of them was a tall, strongly-built man, with broad shoulders and a head that looked twice as large as it really was on account of the shock of long hair and beard that streamed away, black as jet, from around it. The face of this individual was quite handsome, with a frank, reckless expression that was very taking to a stranger. He wore a red shirt, leather breeches and cowhide boots, with the worst white hat ever before seen, full of holes and a mere apology for a head-piece. His only weapon was a long Remington rifle of .44 calibre, which lay beside him.

"Well, Charley," said the *Tabard* "special," as he took off his long cassock, folded it carefully, and deposited it under a tree; "we shall soon find out whether this thing will work or not. How do *you* feel about it?"

"Me and Beautiful, here, hez agreed to put yer through, Mister Meagur; and we're a gwine to do it ef we keeps our scalps," said Colorado Charley, as he spitted

a piece of pork on a stick, to toast over the fire. "Ain't that *so*, Billy?"

The third man of this singular little party rejoiced in the sobriquet of "Beautiful Bill" among the scouts and plainsmen of his acquaintance, on accouut of his extreme ugliness. He was a French half-breed, and his name was Guillaume Fardeau, but his sobriquet was far better known than his legal appellation. He was a short, stout fellow, as strong as a bull, with a broad, dark face, thick lips, and very high cheekbones that almost hid his little eyes. To add to his ugliness, disease and accident had contributed their share, his face being deeply furrowed with the small-pox, while a fearful scar, made by a knife in some fight, traversed his face diagonally from forehead to jaw, cutting the bridge of the nose into a ghastly white gap. In the same, or some other fight possibly, poor Fardeau had lost an eye and three of his front teeth, the last from the butt of a pistol, the first by the simple but efficacious process of "gouging," indulged in by Colonel Abiram Jones of San Elizario, Texas. All these hideous disfigurements and the matted black hair which hung over his eyes did not prevent Beautiful Bill from being one of the best trailers on the plains and a stanch friend of Colorado Charley, who had "fixed" Colonel Abiram Jones for him, on the memorable occasion when poor Beautiful was so roughly handled, and had subsequently "cleaned out the town," bringing away his damaged friend in triumph.

Beautiful Bill looked from the buffalo leg bone that he was cooking in the fire, preparatory to a feast of marrow.

"I go vid you, Charlee, and ve vill take care of Monsieur Maigre—*oui, certainement.*"

"Can't you two fellows call me by my right name?" said Mark with a smile. "It's just as easy to say 'Meagher' as 'Meagur.'"

"*Much* obleeged to ye, Mister Meagur," said Colorado,

in a stately tone. "I ain't much on the eddication, I'll admit; but I l'arned to read, out in Bucks County, Pennsyltucky, and I han't furgot it yet. Ef sich a plain name as yourn—M-e-a-g-h-e-r—don't spell 'Meagur,' I'm a durned fool. It's only them low Irishers as talks about their 'Ma-has' and 'Gaygans' when they spells 'em altogether different. I goes for spellin' korrect and pernouncin' accordin'."

Meagher laughed, and yielded the point.

"You're touching on a grave question, Charley—that of phonetic spelling—and it's puzzled a good many heads besides yours."

"I dunno what you mean by phonetics," said the scout, scratching his head: "but I maintain that spellin's as easy as—— Eh, what is it, Beauty?"

Beautiful Bill interrupted him with a regular Indian grunt, and pointed out on the back trail. They were in a glade of the cedar forest, clothing a ravine that ran up to the open sandy country leading to the divide, and they could see several moving figures in the distance. Colorado Charley instantly sprang for his rifle, exclaiming, "Injuns, by Gosh!"

As for Mark Meagher, he rose to his feet, and shaded his eyes with his hand as he looked earnestly out. Sure enough, there were four moving figures, evidently horsemen, several miles off, but coming straight for the mouth of the ravine; and it needed no great experience on the plains to tell that they were following the trail of the party by the river.

The two plainsmen, in the mean time, after one keen look at the distant figures, started on a lope for their animals, feeding in the meadow. It was a very easy matter to secure these, for each had a long lariat trailing from its halter in the grass, and fastened to a picket-pin. Not until all four had been safely secured to trees, and hobbled into the bargain, did any one of the white men speak.

Mark Meagher, not satisfied with his own keen sight, picked up a large double field glass which lay on the top of the baggage, and carefully scanned the new comers while the two plainsmen were securing the animals. The result of his inspection seemed to be satisfactory, for he put down the glass and turned to Colorado Charley, saying:

"There's no danger; they're Government scouts, and that's an army officer in the middle."

Colorado Charley looked grave.

"Then we'll hev to turn back, Mister Meagur, or wipe 'em all out."

Mark Meagher smiled.

"What for, Charley? We're not doing any harm."

"Thar's no tellin' what sojers calls harm," said Colorado obstinately. "They're the cussedest, meanest lot o' varmints to take away an honest man's profit ever I seen. They've allers got some darned old law to call up to warn yer off Injun ground, and they're allers a warnin' off folks as wants to do a stroke of biz with the reds."

This time Mark laughed outright.

"I'm afraid you've been an Indian trader in your time, Colorado."

"And what ef I hev?" said Charley in an aggravated tone. "I never cheated a red nor a white, and that's more nor the Government agents can say. I never gin 'em musty flour and rotten pork; and ez fur whiskey, I gin 'em what I drunk myself, and no man kin do more. And then up comes a durned pusillanimous galoot of a second loo-*ten*ant, with his brass buttons, and says he, 'My man, you'll hev to leave this here reservation. We don't allow your sort here.' And, by Gosh, he war right. Uncle Sam don't 'low no honest men round his diggin's, nowadays."

And the plainsman expectorated with a strong expression of disgust.

"Well, Charley," said the "special" in a quiet tone, "whoever it is, coming, rifles are no use. You have only one rifle apiece, and these men are very heavily armed: I can see that with the glass. If they are Sioux, it's not our cue to fight, if we wish to get into their camp alive. You promised to leave the Indians to me if I would secure your families from want. Have I done it or not?"

"I'll allow you hev, Mister Meagur," said Charley in a respectful tone. "I ain't grumbling about losin' my scalp, but when thar's only four to three, and we in a wood, it do look mean not to fight."

Mark shook his head.

"If I had wanted to fight, Charley, I should not have taken away your pistols and left them with mine at Laramie. I told you I was going through this thing by the power of impudence, and you'll see if I don't carry my point. Lay down your rifles, throw a blanket over one of them, loose the animals, and keep on with your cooking as if nothing had happened."

Colorado Charley looked sulky a moment; then he laid down his rifle and turned to his fire again, saying in a resigned tone:

"Well, 'tain't *my* funeral. Go ahead, Mister Meagur. My scalp's bought and paid for."

A few moments later the two plainsmen—Beautiful Bill had not uttered a syllable—were sitting over their fire again as if they had no thought of an enemy, while their released animals returned to feed and roll in the verdant meadow with renewed relish.

Mark Meagher continued to watch the approaching strangers through his glass till they were within a mile, when he slowly proceeded to invest himself with his cassock and bands, till he stood in full canonicals. Meantime Armstrong and his Indians continued to advance, their horses quickening the pace to a rapid amble,

and whinnying eagerly at the sight of the luxuriant valley before them, so green and smiling in contrast to the arid waste, thinly sprinkled with cactus, which sloped down from the divide to the bluffs. The Indians had long ago discerned the little party by the trees, and had described the individuals to Armstrong with perfect accuracy. They therefore rode on without taking any apparent precaution, beyond scattering far apart, so as to command a large expanse of country and guard against the presence of others than the party by the river.

At last Armstrong rode into the glade and halted before the party of strangers, gazing at them with considerable surprise.

A priest, in the black cassock and bands of his order, held an open breviary in his hand, and was walking to and fro, with his eyes cast down on the book, muttering to himself in Latin.

"Good morning, sir; good morning," said Armstrong, while the three Indians looked respectfully at the ecclesiastic.

The priest looked up with a start of affected wonder.

"Sir? Oh, I beg your pardon—a stranger. My son, you are welcome—*pax vobiscum. Pax mea vobiscum dabo, in secula. Amen.*"

Armstrong stared at him in wonder; for Latin is no part of a West Pointer's education.

"I hope, sir," he said respectfully, "that you will not object to my joining my party with yours in this camp."

"The world is free to all, my son," said the man in the black cassock, in a tone of mild resignation; "and it is the duty of the servants of the Church to welcome all sinners to the fold. Dismount, if it please you; grass, water, wood and game are gifts of heaven. I hope you will not disturb *us at our devotions*, for the time draws nigh for vespers."

Armstrong swung himself off his horse ere he replied, rather coldly:

"Thank you, sir. I will avail myself of your permission."

He took the saddle off his horse, and turned the animal loose to graze in the sweet herbage, while the three Indians, without showing any evidences of astonishment, quietly followed his example. The horses, tired as they were with their long journey, nevertheless touched no mouthful till each had rolled over and over in the grass, kicking and snorting. It was hard to tell which of the four was the gamest—the thoroughbred of the young officer or the ponies of the three Indians. Not one seemed tired or dispirited, though all were gaunted by their severe privations in the desert. But the Arab blood in all four was equally plain, in the small, pointed heads, with delicate muzzle and large eyes; and it ran as pure in the veins of the little mustang, stunted by centuries of long winters and neglect, as it did in those of the proud sixteen-hands "thoroughbred," that rolled and kicked beside them.

"I hope you'll excuse me, sir," said Armstrong, in a tone of respectful inquiry, "if I ask the pleasure of your name. Mine is Armstrong, Twelfth Cavalry, at your service. Men meeting in the desert like this may surely be friends."

The priest had resumed his breviary with an air of rapt devo[tion] and as if totally unmindful of his companion's r[emarks]. He looked up again, with the same start of sur-

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Indian country."

The priest smiled sweetly.

"I am called in religion, 'Father Innocent,' Mr. Armstrong," he replied. "My business is to seek the Sioux camp and save the souls of the heathen. Do you wish to accompany me thither?"

Armstrong flushed up.

"Yes, I do, Father Innocent, if that's your name. If you're as much in earnest as I am, we shall get there together. I, too, am seeking the camp of the Sioux."

The priest put down his breviary and looked at Armstrong in silence.

"My son," he said, after a long pause, "are you sure you mean what you say? Bethink you, I am going to visit a chief who has sworn implacable enmity to the American government, and that you will be surrounded by hundreds of warriors thirsting for your blood, and fully able to take it."

Armstrong smiled slightly.

"I know it, Father Innocent, but if an unarmed priest can run the risk, a soldier can do no less than follow him."

"You forget the difference, my son," said Father Innocent, very gravely. "Thanks to the heroism and devotion of the members of the Society of Jesus, the wildest Indian of the hostile bands will respect and hold harmless the cassock of the missionary. He knows that we want nothing of him, no house, no lands, no costly furs, nothing but food and lodging, for which we pay, and a silent audience when we preach. I run no danger now, if once I am recognized as a priest: you, on the other hand, are an enemy in their ob
wer."
Armstrong bowed, but persisted.
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"I see your argument, father, and it is a good one; but duty
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ertheless I have concluded either to go on with you, as a
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id, or to take you back to Marengo with me as a pris-
us at
Is that plain?"

The priest started slightly.

"My son," he said, "I hardly think it would be just or generous to do either. You are, of course, not a member of the Church?"

"Not of yours, father; but I think that we may as well leave religion out of the question. I am a Christian, and on that score you are bound to help me against pagans."

"I am bound to abstain from blood and strife," said the priest in an accent of reproof, for Armstrong's tone was becoming flippant. "How can I, who go to the camp of the Standing Bear as a messenger from heaven, introduce with me a spy who will ferret out his plans and plot murder against the women and children of his tribe?"

Armstrong's face fell before the other, for the priest spoke with the severity of truth. The young officer had caught the prevailing tone of morality current on the Western frontier with regard to Indians, and had looked upon his chance discovery of this seeming missionary as an opportunity by which to distinguish himself, by penetrating into the camp of the hostiles, with a certainty of seeing everything, and trusting to the goddess Fortune to extricate himself afterward. The unexpected opposition hardened him into sullenness.

"Very well, Father Innocent," he said; "then I shall have to take you back with me to Marengo. Either we go together or not at all."

The missionary shrugged his shoulders.

"I shall not go back with you, my son; and if you go with me, you go at your own peril. I will not be responsible for your safety, unless you send away your Indians, give up your arms, and accompany me in the guise of my servant. I will allow no weapons in my party save the rifles of my two guides, which are only used to supply meat for our wants."

"Very well, Father Innocent," said the officer, coolly. "I accept your terms, and I will go as your servant."

Father Innocent looked at him again from head to foot with a strange glance of reluctant admiration.

"My son," he said, "if you will take the advice of an older man, you will go back; but if you come with me, you must remember that you bring me into fresh danger if you are found out to be other than my servant."

This touched the gentleman and officer, and the young man hesitated.

"If I thought that, father, I would follow your trail and take my chances of braving out discovery. You shall not suffer from my companionship. If you wish, I will do that."

Father Innocent shook his head with a heavy sigh.

"It is too late, Mr. Armstrong. Ten minutes ago I could have said 'yes,' but now we must brave it out together. I see you are a man of honor; and I will become responsible for you. But it must be as I said. Those Indians must go back. They would be recognized at once. You must go as my servant and acolyte. I will teach you the duties. You must leave your belt and pistols here with your Indians, together with your horse, and either you ride the pack-mule or walk. A poor priest's servant does not ride a blood-horse. If you are found out—then we are both lost. In that case, I keep this for myself."

And the priest showed the soldier a small pistol, which he carried in his breast.

Armstrong started back in wonder.

"You are no priest," he said, decidedly. "Who are you?"

"I am the special correspondent of the New York *Tabard*, Mr. Armstrong," said Father Innocent, coolly; "and I like your pluck. I think we'll manage to put this *thing through* before we're done. If it costs you your com-

mission and you can write a spicy letter, I'll insure you a place on the *Tabard*, for I don't believe there's an officer in your hide-bound little army that would dare to do as you've done."

And the two young men shook hands heartily.

"And now tell me frankly, Mr. Armstrong," said Mark Meagher, a moment later: "did you suspect my disguise when you came into camp?"

"Frankly, no. You are a good actor."

"Well, you know we newspaper men have to be a little of everything. Little did I think, when my old mother used to make me behave myself as an acolyte at St. Peter's in Barclay Street, and when Father O'Reilly used to thrash us boys regularly, that the time would come when I should be able to utilize the knowledge. I own I don't half like the job, but the *Tabard* must have the news, and I'm bound to report that council verbatim."

"I hope we shall be able to do it," said Armstrong.

"I know we shall," said Mark. "I feel it in my bones, young fellow, and my bones never deceive me. Have a buffalo steak."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BUFFALO TRAIL.

THE enclosure of Fort Marengo was all bright with color and motion, while the strains of music from the mounted band of the Twelfth Cavalry showed that some festivity was in progress. Outside the fort were grouped two or three wagons and a number of ambulances, while within, the parade ground was covered with horsemen and ladies on horseback. The band was playing away merrily, and most of the officers of the post, attended by orderlies, were moving about, while at least twenty or thirty citizens, some on foot, some on Indian ponies, others on mules, were dodging about the enclosure, most of them carrying a battery of weapons, under which they looked excessively stiff and uncomfortable. Two of the ambulances from outside had just driven within the enclosure of the fort, and were drawing up in front of the commandant's quarters as the scene opened.

Judge Brinton, in strong, gray clothes, very different from his usual glossy black, was standing on the steps awaiting the ambulance, with Madam Lacy at his side; and General St. Aure, his uniform exchanged for a jaunty suit of buckskin, was giving orders from the piazza as to the disposition of his guests.

"That ambulance is for Madam Lacy and yourself, Judge. No one else will bother you, so that you can have plenty of room. The other is for the provender. I don't mean to starve you. Allow me to help you, madam [to *Miss Lacy*]. Judge, if you'll get in, we're ready to start.

We must make fourteen miles by lunch time before we strike the buffalo trail. That's right. Now you're all in. Where's Mr. Darcy?"

Lieutenant Darcy, still pale and wearing his right arm in a sling, rode up. He had never found his old enemy, Tatonka, whose trail had been followed without success till it disappeared in the wastes of the Little Missouri, while the dusky squaws and papooses of that revengeful savage had vanished on the very same night.

"Mr. Darcy, I want you to understand that you are detailed to the ambulance escort," said St. Aure, in his off-hand way. "I won't have you bringing disgrace on Doctor Yunger's treatment by racing off to get your arm into a fever when it's healing so kindly. Get your train into shape, sir. Orderly, bring up Dandy."

Presently the irregular groups, scattered about the parade-ground, broke up and moved away as the ambulances drove out, and the party moved off into the green prairie, covered with rich grass, that extended in a fertile belt from Marengo to within a few miles of the Little Missouri, where it merged in the "Bad Lands." The atmosphere was pure and dry, and of remarkable clearness, so that distant objects appeared unnaturally near. It was also quite cool and bracing, for it was the middle of September, and more than a month had passed since the scouting party, commanded by Van Dyck, had quitted the fort for the Indian country. During all this time nothing had been heard of Indians in the vicinity, and several scouting parties had scoured the country for a distance of a hundred miles around the fort, reporting all quiet, no new trails, the old ones pointing toward the north-west, and game plenty and undisturbed. It was under these circumstances, and moved by the influx of a large party of visitors from the east, all crazy for a buffalo hunt, that General St. Aure had *organized the present* party, which was moving out into

the prairie with so much pomp and splendor, the band playing and every one full of life and spirits.

Almost all the officers of the fort were out, including the two St. Aures and Peyton, while the ladies of the garrison, with such of their visitors as could ride, were mounted and enjoying themselves hugely.

Julie Brinton, thanks to the luxury of a rich papa, was riding her own thoroughbred, sent from the east some weeks before; but Nettie Dashwood, being only a niece and a poor relation at that, had to be contented with her own saddle and what she could get in the way of a mount at the post.

Quite unexpectedly to the rest of the garrison, it was Jim St. Aure, never before known to do a gallant thing—for Jim was reputed a woman-hater—who came to her rescue.

"Look here, little girl," said Jim, in his odd, gruff way, imitated from his brother in some of his eccentric moods, "I've got a little rat of a pony that's not much to look at, but he can go like a streak. If you like to have a try at him, I think he'll carry your weight ahead of every one here except Sensation. I won him of Bertie the other day, and he's got nothing to do in the stable."

Nettie, who was just then feeling particularly mournful at the prospect of having to ride a big, raw-boned troop-horse, looked up at him very gratefully.

"Oh, Colonel St. Aure, you don't surely mean the racer. You're too good. I might hurt the horse. I ought not to take it from you."

"Let my man have your saddle when I send him," quoth Jim, with a twist of his face, "and don't be a nonsensical little humbug."

And thus it came about that when they rode out of the *fort, there* was Nettie, in her familiar blue and white, *defiant and* saucy as ever, and mounted on a small, gray

horse, about thirteen and a half hands high, that looked and stepped like a miniature of Jim St. Aure's gray thoroughbred Sensation, once a four-mile racer down in South Carolina, where Jim had picked her up from a ruined owner.

Mrs. St. Aure on a handsome black, her husband on Dandy, Charley Peyton and his child wife, with Juliet Brinton on her brown thoroughbred, all were riding along together surrounded by officers and citizens, with few of whom this story has any concern.

Burke, who had not yet got that leave for which he had applied on the strength of his uncle's legacy, was at the head of the scouts who were to explore the country ahead, and the only officer of rank left behind was old Grouty, who, being in command, no sooner saw the expedition depart, than he betook himself to his quarters, opened a new bottle of whiskey, and proceeded to make up for a month's abstention from sprees.

The hunting party proceeded on its way gayly enough, the sober train of wagons rattling and creaking along over the grass, the riders scattered over the plain, running races or dashing aimlessly about, most of them evincing a disposition to talk loud and shout.

"There is something wonderfully invigorating in this atmosphere," observed Judge Brinton, from his seat in the ambulance, to his sister-in-law. "I declare, Isabel, I have a mind to get out and try a gallop myself."

"Do," said the old lady, in her most sarcastic tones. "You'll look so dignified, Joseph, at your age and with your figure, mounting a common troop-horse and careering about like a boy of twenty. I should think you'd know better than to expose yourself to ridicule. The Brintons never were a riding stock."

The Judge reddened perceptibly. There are some things no man, however much in awe of a woman, can stand.

One of these is a reflection on his riding, the second on his carving. A cool recommendation to delegate one to the groom, the other to the footman, has caused many a breach in households of the highest respectability.

"Excuse me, my dear sister," he said, with pompous politeness; "I cannot consent to entertain the idea that I shall appear ridiculous on horseback. It is true that I have given up the exercise for the last few years, but it was from want of time, not capacity. Our friend, the General, has kindly offered me a horse, and I shall ride it to-morrow, if not to-day."

Miss Lacy contented herself with a sniff of great significance, and said no more. The fact is that the bracing atmosphere of the plains made the old lady unusually cheerful herself, and had she been a little younger, there is no telling whether she might not have mounted a horse herself, for whatever the riding genealogy of the Brintons, there was no doubt as to the equestrianism of the Lacys. Nettie Dashwood was Lacy to the backbone, in spite of her name, and there is some doubt whether her Irish father, who came of a hard-riding and drinking family, had given or received most in the person of his daughter to the horse-loving fraternity. Miss Lacy, with all her cross-grained ways, could not help feeling proud of Nettie that day, as she watched her scampering over the green prairie beside Colonel Jim, the little gray pony discovering an astonishing turn of speed for short distances.

Even her cousin Juliet, whose costume was so correct and whose fine, voluptuous figure was so taking to the generality of men, had not half the admirers that day that fell to little will-o'-the-wisp Nettie, slight and frail in figure—a "mere bag of bones," old Groutey contemptuously called her over his cups to Burke, who didn't seem to take the joke.

The fourteen miles which St. Aure had promised them

for the march before dinner were passed with great rapidity, and about two in the afternoon the wagons halted in a lovely little valley, full of the sweetest of grass and a line of little pools of water that indicated the bed of a stream, while the country all round was the *beau ideal* of what an eastern man associates with the word "prairie." As far as the eye could see stretched out an apparently limitless ocean of waving grass, rolling into hills and hollows, like billows on the sea, and not a mountain disturbed the monotony of the blue line of the horizon all round.

"Yes, Miss Brinton, this is a very favorable specimen of the plains," said Charley Peyton, in answer to a question. "You must not imagine that this country extends to California. All this flat was once, I imagine, the bed of a series of shallow lagoons, part of the Missouri, which gradually dried up and left this black alluvial soil. No wonder the grass grows so rankly, and the buffalo cling to these pastures so long. Anywhere else they would have fled long ago under the hunting."

"Are we to stop here?" asked the lady, as she saw the wagoners beginning to unhitch their teams.

"Yes, we go into camp here, within a mile of one of the great buffalo trails. Would you like to see a buffalo?"

"Very much," said Juliet in her rich, low tones; "but I warn you, I shall make no attempt to kill one, Mr. Peyton, unless *you* will take care of me."

And she raised her great dark blue eyes to meet his in a tender, appealing sort of manner, the more impressive because Mrs. Peyton was near the ambulances at the moment, giving some orders.

Adjutant Charles Peyton would have been more or less than human if he had resisted that glance and tone from a Juno-like being such as Juliet Brinton.

"I shall be only too happy to act as your escort if we see any buffalo, Miss Brinton," he said. "I think that if

we ride out a little way and take a good glass, we may find some, even to-day. Will you permit me to call my wife, and we can go together?"

"Oh, no. We needn't trouble Mrs. Peyton," said Juliet, in her softest and most dangerous tones. "I see she is already busy. There's Colonel St. Aure going, so I needn't burden you with the duty of escort, but go with him and Nettie."

And she turned her horse away after the lively pair she spoke of, who were already leaving the camp though every one else was dismounting. Charley Peyton hesitated, cast one glance at his wife, engaged over the erection of the family tent and superintending the men; another at the syren who was luring him away. As usual in such cases, the syren triumphed for the time, and when Mrs. Charley came round to look for her husband she found him not, but learned that he had gone off with some ladies to look after game. Whereat the young bride, who had never known before what a dangerous rival meant, became outwardly still and inwardly raging against "that Brinton girl," against whom she cherished dire schemes of revenge forthwith.

Meantime the four people thus separated from the rest of the party rode along over the green prairie till they were out of sight of camp, and found themselves apparently alone in the midst of a trackless ocean of grassy knolls.

"Well, little girl," said Jim St. Aure, "suppose I was to run away from you here: do you think you could find your way back home again to Marengo, or even to camp?"

"I don't know," said Nettie, a little timidly. "I think if I *had* to do it, I could."

"Which way would you go?" asked Jim.

"Why, east, I suppose. We've come west from Marengo," said the girl simply.

Jim St. Aure smiled.

"How would you know which was east?"

"Why, by the sun, of course."

"Suppose there were clouds over it—how then?

"Why, I don't know—don't bother me—look at my compass, to be sure."

"What!" exclaimed Jim in great surprise. "Do *you* carry a compass. Why, little girl, you're a marvel for a woman. I'll bet that cousin of yours would never have thought of such a thing."

He looked round as he spoke at Juliet, who was riding some distance in the rear with Adjutant Peyton, both conversing earnestly.

Nettie immediately came to her defence.

"Indeed, you're quite wrong, sir. Juliet knows ever so much. She can talk three languages, and——"

"Yes, I know," interrupted Jim in his cynical way; "and play Beethoven's sonatas, and paint flowers, and sing, and so forth. But I'll bet she doesn't know now where to look for Marengo if she was lost."

"I don't see why she should care about that," said Nettie with all her old spirit. "We're not going to be lost."

As she spoke they were ascending a little knoll, and her companion laid his hand on her bridle as they neared the top.

"Go slow," he said. "There may be game on the other side. Halt. Let me go up alone. Can you hold a horse?"

"Yes," replied Nettie, who with Jim St. Aure behaved much like an old comrade.

Jim flung her the rein as he jumped off, and went cautiously up the hill, spyglass in hand, till he came to the top, when he lay flat down and peered through the grass. Presently Peyton and Juliet came up and halted by Nettie, watching the officer, who seemed to have found something.

At last he backed slowly down the hill, as if fearful of being seen, and came running back, putting up his spyglass as he came. He mounted his horse in silence.

"Get back to camp, Charley," he said in a short, sharp manner, as soon as he was fairly in the saddle. "There are strange Indians abroad."

Charley Peyton started a little and looked at Juliet, who had turned deadly pale and looked ready to fall from her horse. As for Nettie, the little witch actually straightened up in her saddle and smiled, her eyes flashing.

"What fun!" exclaimed the girl. "Now we'll have a real adventure. I've not seen a wild Indian yet."

Both officers glanced at each other with a new admiration in their faces. She looked so frank and innocent, so brave and fearless, in contrast to her more massively moulded cousin, who was shaking with terror. Then Jim turned on Juliet sternly.

"Control yourself, Miss Brinton," he said. "There is no danger. The Indians are at least five miles off, and have not seen us. We can get back to camp if you don't delay us with hysterics. Ride back with Peyton as fast as you can. Miss Nettie and I will mislead them. Go ahead, Charley."

The Adjutant needed no second bidding. He was already thoroughly disillusionized over his Juno; for there is nothing so annoying to men as foolish terrors in a moment when coolness is required. Jim St. Aure cut Juliet's horse with his whip as Peyton seized her bridle, and he had the satisfaction of seeing the two gallop away at full speed toward camp, which was less than a mile distant. Then Colonel Jim turned to Nettie and spoke in a grave tone.

"You're a plucky little girl, Nettie, but you don't *know your own* danger. You think Indians are romantic

creatures. I tell you they are devils in human shape, who have no respect for youth, age, sex, anything but their own diabolical wills. If I thought they would catch us, I'd take my revolver and shoot you and myself dead just as they came up. Have you courage to watch them, knowing that?"

Nettie turned a little paler and began to tremble. Then she stiffened up, set her teeth and said:

"Yes. I can shoot too. Look here."

And she proudly produced an ivory-handled revolver from a little holster at her waist. It was a mere toy of a thing.

"Who gave you that?" queried Jim, amused in spite of the gravity of the occasion.

"Mr. Darcy, sir; and I can hit a hat every time at ten paces," said Nettie, proudly.

Jim nodded his head slowly.

"You remind me of what Colorado Charley said to a city fellow who showed him one of those little humbugs."

"And who's Colorado Charley?" asked Nettie, as she put up her revolver again.

"A scout who used to be with us. 'See hyar, stranger,' said he, 'if you was to shoot me with that ar thing and I was ever to hear of it, I'd lam you like thunder.' No, no; keep that for yourself, little girl, as a last resort."

As he spoke he turned his horse up the hill, and the two deliberately rode up, till they were in full view of the people Jim St. Aure had seen. Away on the distant prairie there were some moving figures, strung out in an irregular line and coming toward them. They were mere dots on the landscape.

"And how do you know those are Indians?" asked Nettie curiously. "I can only see they're on horseback, and that's all."

Jim St. Aure handed her the glass.

"I can't swear to any but the first dozen," he said; "but you can see their toggery plainly."

Nettie took the glass and looked long and steadily.

"They're not Indians," she said. "They've got hats on and the feathers are stuck in them."

"They're Indians none the less," replied Jim; "and what's more, they see us. Look at them beginning to gallop."

"Pshaw!" said Nettie scornfully. "They can't catch us, Colonel Jim—I mean St. Aure."

Jim laughed.

"Out here, where no one hears us, you may call me plain 'Jim,' if you'll let me say 'Nettie'; but we mustn't let the Madam hear us in camp. You're quite right and a cool little girl, Nettie. Those fellows can't catch us to save their lives. Our horses are game for a four-mile gallop, so you can take a good long look at your painted friends through that glass if you like. Do they look as poetical as you thought they would?"

Nettie shook her head.

"They're nasty looking creatures. I thought they had tall crests of feathers. These people have ugly tall hats. Why, there's one in a blue coat and brass buttons. He's not an Indian at all."

"Lend me the glass a minute, please," said Jim at this juncture. "I may be mistaken, but——"

He looked long and carefully through the glass, and then suddenly shut it up and turned to his companion with a loud laugh.

"Take your whip to me, Nettie. I deserve it," he exclaimed. "I didn't know our own people. It's Van Dyck's scouting party coming back."

Nettie turned as white as a ghost, and then flushed scarlet, as she involuntarily put her hand to her breast.

"*Yes, yes,*" said Jim soothingly. "You'll not have to

open that packet, little girl, and I'm glad of it. Your friend's come back as I said he would."

"Did you see *him?*" eagerly asked the girl.

Colonel Jim considered a moment.

"Well, come to think of it, I didn't. But he must be there. It's too far off to recognize faces. I'll try another look."

"Oh, please do," said Nettie imploringly. "I don't know why—I couldn't see if I tried. You look—please do, dear, good Colonel Jim."

She laid her hand on his arm and looked up in his face with a pitiful look in her great gray-blue eyes, as different from Juliet's dark blue orbs as those of an intellectual spiritual girl always will be from those of a voluptuous woman of lymphatic temperament.

Jim St. Aure was instantly conquered. He drew out his glass again and narrowly scanned the approaching party, now easily recognizable. He distinguished Van Dyck's bulky figure at the head of the little column of soldiers, horses worn and gaunted by hard work, men dirty and bearded. He could distinguish Red Arrow's scouts, but he could nowhere see Red Arrow himself nor Armstrong. Jim kept on looking for a time, with a heavy foreboding of evil at his heart, and revolving what he should say to the girl beside him, who was waiting, white and still, the verdict. At last he took down the glass, and Nettie read his face before he spoke. She put out her hand.

"You needn't. I know it. He's gone. I knew Con would betray him—the coward—because he loved Juliet. Oh, Colonel Jim, if I were only a man, I'd kill that wretch! I'd kill him, kill him, kill him!"

And the girl raised her voice almost to a shriek, as she trembled with rage and grief.

"Look here, Nettie," said the old bachelor, Jim, very kindly but *firmly*, "you're running away from facts on

theories, my little girl. Armstrong's not there, but no more is Red Arrow, the best scout on the plains. Probably they're behind, somewhere, and may come up later. Anyway, we can best find out by riding on to meet them."

"I'll not do it," said Nettie passionately. "Let us go back to camp. They shall never say that I, who was his only friend with Juliet, would go and speak to his rival, when he came back without Armstrong. When I am a friend I stick to my friends."

"You do indeed," said Jim, gravely; "better than you dream of, little girl. Let us go back."

And the two turned their horses on the approaching party and galloped back to camp at full speed, Nettie seeming to find some alleviation for her misery in the rapid motion.

They found the camp in order; St. Aure on horseback, the wagons corralled, and all the loose horses gathered within the enclosure; while the armed men were mustering into a heavy troop.

The news they brought dissipated the alarm, and, very soon after, St. Aure rode out with an escort to meet the returning scouting party, while Nettie flew to Mrs. St. Aure's tent to find Juliet.

General St. Aure met Lieutenant Van Dyck half a mile from the camp.

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. VAN DYCK REPORTS.

ST. AURE'S keen glance scanned the approaching party with a searching expression, but he said nothing as he reined in his horse. Van Dyck was riding Armstrong's splendid bay thoroughbred, low in flesh but full of spirit, and his men behind him looked as if they had seen hard service, but were ready for more, while the ponies of the Indian scouts were in fair condition. In the rear of the soldiers were several led horses and mules, among them the big sorrel that Van Dyck had ridden when he left the post.

St. Aure looked cold and severe as he scanned the party, but punctiliously returned the salute of Van Dyck, who halted his men and rode up to his chief.

"I have the honor to report my party, sir," said the Lieutenant, touching his cap. "We have been within ten miles of the Yellowstone, found several lodge-pole trails, jumped a band of Sioux, killing three bucks and taking several ponies, and have lost Mr. Armstrong and Red Arrow the scout, captured by hostile Indians."

St. Aure looked at him with his keen gray eyes.

"How do you know that, sir?"

Van Dyck hesitated an instant, then went on in the same glib manner in which he had begun.

"Mr. Armstrong strayed away from the party with Red Arrow, General, after an Indian trail. He asked permission to follow it, and took with him Red Arrow, Running Wolf and The Dog, Pawnee scouts. Our understanding

was that he was to meet the party in three days at Manley's stockade, by the mouth of Hominy Creek—the one General Manley put up on the last expedition, General——"

"Yes, yes. Go on, sir," said the General, impatiently.

"Well, General, we waited three days, feeding up the stock, sir, and on the second day the two scouts came in with Mr. Armstrong's horse and clothes, reporting a band of Sioux near by, camped on the lodge-pole trail we had followed. So I thought it best to attack them, sir, and we did so next night, and my horse was wounded, and——"

"But Mr. Armstrong, sir—what of him?" asked the General, impatiently. "I can hear the rest another time. You say the scouts returned with——"

"Mr. Armstrong's horse and clothes, sir—yes. They reported that he had met an Indian trader or something of the sort—a negro, from their story, I should say—and had gone off with this man to the Indian camp."

St. Aure started, and seemed to fall into a train of deep thought. At last he said:

"What do you mean by a negro—what did the scouts call him that made you think he was a negro?"

"They said that one of the party was an Indian trader, who had a black father, General. They must have meant a mulatto, I suppose."

St. Aure smiled in his grim fashion when meeting ignorance.

"You've not seen much Indian service, I imagine, Mr. Van Dyck; have you?"

Van Dyck colored angrily.

"I think so, sir. General Slaughter has the reputation of knowing his business——"

"Yes—but you were not with him long, if I am not mistaken," said St. Aure, coldly. "At all events, this black

father you speak of is a missionary. What makes you think Mr. Armstrong a prisoner, sir?"

"Because he ventured alone into the midst of a country swarming with Indians, General. I would not have done it for a million of dollars. If we had not surprised that band of Sioux, and so demoralized them, we might not be here ourselves."

"How many were there in this band you speak of?" asked St. Aure, ignoring the rest of Van Dyck's remarks.

"Three teepees, General, with a herd of about fifty ponies. Of course, after the fight, we made the best of our way back out of the Indian country."

"I should suppose so," said St. Aure, shortly. Then he fell into another train of thought, from which he roused up to inquire:

"Did you authorize Mr. Armstrong to go on this expedition alone?"

Van Dyck hesitated again.

"Not into useless danger, General. My orders were very strict to return to Manley's stockade in time to march for Marengo on the third day. In going when he did—I don't wish to be severe on poor Armstrong, General—but—in fact—he exceeded his orders. However, poor fellow, he has paid for his rashness by this time. We shall never see him again, General."

The Lieutenant ended with a sigh, and his look was bent sadly on the ground. He did not see that St. Aure's gray eyes were fixed on him, glowing under the shaggy blonde eyebrows, while the usual thoughtful frown of the General's strong face was deepened to anger. A short silence ensued, and then St. Aure spoke in a harsh, abrupt tone.

"Very good, Mr. Van Dyck. We are out on a hunting party. Take your men into the fort with ours, sir. I will see you further about this. You can draw a feed of grain off the commissary wagon, if you wish. I don't think we

shall do much hunting now. Poor Armstrong! Poor lad!"

He ended in a very different manner, then wheeled his horse away from Van Dyck with something very like a shudder; struck in his spurs and went tearing away to camp in his usual break-neck style, man and horse flying over the plain like one creature.

When he came to the camp, St. Aure found everything at a standstill, and people were lounging about, looking at each other as if puzzled what to do. The erroneous report of strange Indians, brought in by Peyton and Juliet Brinton, had first set them all into a tremble, and the subsequent news of Van Dyck's return had not quieted them. All sorts of rumors had been flying about, and the fact that an officer and a scout were missing had leaked out from Jim St. Aure's gruff remark to Captain Burke: "All back but Armstrong and Red Arrow."

In a camp, rumors fly like sparks in a gale, and spread like fire in a hay field. Enlisted men, so silent and respectful before their officers, are marvellous retailers of eavesdroppings, and long before St. Aure came into camp it was settled that Mr. Van Dyck had had a terrible Indian fight, lost half his men, and that Mr. Armstrong was killed. The citizens, gathering these stories from their servants and each other, and not knowing their emptiness, were already wishing themselves safe back in the midst of civilization, and quite willing to forego possible buffaloes to avoid equally possible Indians, when St. Aure came dashing in like a tempest, pulling Dandy on his haunches in front of his tent, while his escort galloped round to the rear in the same reckless manner. This manner of entering camp of course confirmed the suspicions of the shrewdest citizens that there was danger at hand, and they began to run for their mules and what not, threatening a stampede.

St. Aure jumped off his horse in front of his tent, and

Dandy trotted off to the rear as if he knew his place. Mrs. St. Aure put her head out of the tent and looked inquiringly at her husband, but said nothing. St. Aure nodded.

"All right, Elsie. No danger to us, but the hunt's broken up. I've got the news I was waiting for." Then he called out:

"Bugler—where's that bugler?—sound 'boot and saddle' at once. We're going back to the fort."

Every one heard him, as he intended they should; and long before the bugler had begun the call, saddles were being dragged out, horses taken from the picket line, and teams harnessing. The citizens were silent and nervous, packing up as if for dear life, while the soldiers, more used to the excitement of moving camp, sat around their fires smoking to the last minute, but grumbling all the while, and never stirred till they heard the bugle. Judge Brinton came bustling up to St. Aure's tent, very red in the face.

"I trust, my dear General, that nothing serious is the matter."

"No, Judge, no," said St. Aure shortly. "A party has come in with news from the Indian country, and we have been waiting for it to commence a combined movement. We must drop our hunt and get back to the fort—that's all. I'm sorry you should lose your sport, but war and business will not be delayed."

"Of course not," said the Judge in a tone of great relief. "You must not let us detain you in any manner, my dear General. We will take the train for the east tomorrow morning."

St. Aure smiled faintly.

"Of course I know there will be a great stampede, now war begins. But you need not fear, Judge. The fort is perfectly safe at all times. It will only be dull for the girls we leave behind us."

The Judge did not pursue the conversation any further, the more so because he saw plainly what the General was driving at, and he did not care to stay at a lonely post to comfort desolate women. He turned away, stammering:

"Yes, General, of course. Wish I could help you, but I don't see how I can. I hope you will have a very pleasant expedition, sir."

Then he bustled away to the tent, in front of which Miss Lacy was seated in a camp chair, aristocratically stolid and unmoved by the clamor round her. A smile was on her handsome old face, and she placidly surveyed her brother-in-law through her double eyeglasses as he came up, the picture of nervous excitement.

"This reminds me, Joseph," said the old lady calmly, "of what my poor brother used to tell me of his army life—here to-day, there to-morrow. I always thought I should like a little taste of that sort of thing. It's the crusading blood of the middle ages coming out, I think. Do you know that I positively enjoy this sudden flitting?"

Certainly it was by no means hard for the old lady, who sat composedly on her chair to the last minute, watching the bustle round her, with nothing to do but to step into the ambulance when it came up.

"Where is Juliet?" asked the Judge nervously, for neither his daughter nor Nettie Dashwood was visible.

"They were here a moment ago—that is, Juliet was, Joseph," said Miss Lacy coolly. "Nettie I've not seen, but I'll trust her to come out all right. She's a true Lacy, and you'll find her in the middle of the bustle, where *I* should be, if I were thirty years younger."

Away bustled the Judge as if his life depended on keeping in motion, and passed among the ambulances and pack mules that were moving about the camp among the falling tents. He found the General's marquee looped up *at the sides,* and already emptied of furniture, while Mrs.

St. Aure, quiet and placid as ever, her rosy cheeks flushed with health, stood in the midst of a group of busy men, directing the work as if at home in the fort. Nettie Dashwood, her riding habit looped up, was flitting to and fro, carrying small articles to the wagons; and Mrs. St. Aure, to the Judge's surprise, was making no effort to stop her from her occupation, though servants were plenty. The Judge, being a selfish old man and already preoccupied, did not notice Nettie's pale, desperate face, as Mrs. St. Aure had, or he might have realized why the gentle lady had allowed her guest to busy herself so far.

"Where is my daughter, Mrs. St. Aure?" he asked. "Have you seen her?"

"I think you will find her in Mrs. Peyton's tent—the next, Judge," said the General's wife rather coldly. "Miss Brinton seems to be unnecessarily alarmed, and my sister is taking care of her till she recovers her self-control."

Away bustled the Judge to Peyton's tent, where he found Juliet in a large camp armchair, with Charley Peyton on one side and Mrs. Peyton on the other, the girl herself in a sort of mild hysterics, while the Adjutant looked very much frightened, and his child-wife was caressing and soothing the patient in full sympathetic faith. They both looked exceedingly grateful for the interruption, and Charley drew the Judge to one side, explaining in a low tone how Miss Brinton had been frightened by a report of Indians, and had only had strength to reach camp with him when she had been taken with these spasms.

"Is she often this way?" asked Charley innocently.

"No—yes—dear me—I don't know—we must send for my sister Isabel instantly," stammered the Judge.

"We didn't dare, for fear of frightening Miss Lacy," explained the bride timidly; "but I'm afraid that we shall have to, unless Miss Dashwood——"

"Of *course*. Why didn't she come?" spluttered the

Judge, rushing out. "Nettie, Nettie, don't you know your cousin is ill? Come here, my child, quickly."

Nettie dropped her work and came forward, with the same pale set face, when Mrs. St. Aure, who had never before been known to speak sharply to mortal being, suddenly interposed, and actually put her arm around Nettie, saying:

"Wait a moment, my dear. I will not allow it."

Then she put her on one side, and went up to Judge Brinton, speaking very decidedly.

"You must excuse Miss Dashwood this morning, Judge. Your daughter is not ill, only a little self-indulgent. If I were you, I would either speak to her sharply or call Miss Lacy. Don't be afraid; women will sometimes stand scolding."

The Judge stood perfectly astounded; then he realized the force of the advice to call his sister-in-law, which was soon done. Madam Lacy, erect, fragile, but full of pluck, no sooner set eyes on her niece and the two terrified comforters than she tossed her head slightly.

"That's nerves," said the practical old lady coldly. "A Lacy never gives way to nerves. Here, my dear."

A bottle of concentrated hartshorn soon ended the alternate sobs and laughs of the fair patient, who woke with a start and clung to Charley Peyton's arm, as if terrified, crying:

"Oh, save me! They're coming!"

"Poor thing!" said the innocent bride pityingly, while Charley looked awkward and annoyed. It was evident that he was heartily sick of his Juno already. Still, it was some minutes before Juliet ceased her sobs and clinging to the handsome Adjutant, till Miss Lacy sharply said:

"There, Juliet; we've had enough nerves now. We are going back to the fort, child. Are you able to ride, or *will you go in the* ambulance with me?"

At that Juliet slowly came to herself, and finally protested that she felt ashamed of herself—but she couldn't help it—she thought she'd be able to ride—wouldn't trouble Aunt Isabel.

The old lady marched out with a sniff of great significance, saying:

"I thought so."

When she came out, Peyton's tent was the only-one left standing, and the wagons were driving up to take the last loads, while Mrs. St. Aure, with her arm still around Nettie, was walking about amidst the ruins of the late camp, giving directions about baggage; and the General was already on horseback, at a little distance, directing the formation of column of route.

As the old lady looked round her, an officer on a bay thoroughbred rode up and dismounted, saying as he came up to her:

"Morning, Aunt Isabel. Got back safe, you see."

Miss Lacy uttered a little scream.

"Cornelius! Have *you* come back?"

Then all her old worldly caution flashed over her, and she hastily added in a low tone:

"Where is the other one—Mr. Armstrong?"

She did not notice that Mrs. St. Aure and Nettie Dashwood were standing near, with their backs turned on Van Dyck, but able to hear all that passed.

"You'll never see poor Armstrong again, Aunt Isabel," said Van Dyck in a tone of hardly concealed triumph. "The Indians have got him, through his own rashness. He's probably burnt alive by this time."

Mrs. St. Aure, who had her arm round Nettie's waist, looked apprehensively down at her. To her surprise the girl never drooped, but she felt her stiffen up and saw her turn her head toward Van Dyck with a flash in her great gray-blue *eyes, while she* set her teeth and breathed hard.

"Coward!" muttered the girl; and then she walked away with Mrs. St. Aure, without speaking to her cousin.

Cornelius, on his part, did not seem to be troubled about her disdain, though he saw it plainly, for he went on talking to Miss Lacy as if nothing had happened.

"Where's Juliet?" was his next question.

But the old lady had heard him tell of Armstrong's death, and she was not quite heartless enough to pursue the conversation in the same strain.

"Juliet's been frightened," she said sharply. "Enough to frighten any young girl, to think that Indians were coming into camp. How did that poor young fellow get taken, Cornelius?"

Van Dyck shrugged his shoulders.

"How the deuce can I tell? I wasn't with him. He went off on a wild-goose chase into the Indian camp, like a fool as he was, and it served him right if he came to grief."

Miss Lacy looked at him in her keen, cynical way.

"*You* came off safe, I see. Yet he went with you."

"Well, what of that?" asked Cornelius in an aggravated tone. "What the deuce makes all you people in camp look and talk at me in this queer way because Armstrong got killed? *I* wasn't his keeper. Lord knows you were rude enough to him, Aunt Bell, when he was at the Beeches. I don't see why *you* should make such a fuss over him."

Miss Lacy pursed up her lips into a strange sort of smile.

"For all that, Master Con," she said, "he was a fine young fellow, and a brave one."

Then the old lady turned away as rudely as ever an aunt turned from a nephew, leaving Cornelius standing staring after her. Truly it seemed as if his report was not bringing him much credit.

CHAPTER XVI.

LETTER AND BUTTON.

"I TOLD you, Elsie, that she'd be the one to take the hearts," said Jim St. Aure to his sister-in-law, as he sat in his room at Fort Marengo, smoking his pipe, that very evening, while Mrs. St. Aure and the General, who had come over to pay a short visit, sat near him. "I never saw one of those dreadful good girls, like that heiress of yours, that wouldn't steal cream like any other quiet cat, when no one was looking; and as for your 'pert little thing,' she's a trump, if ever there was one. Thank you for answering my signal so soon, Elsie. You took good care of her, and she needed it."

This speech came out of the silence which succeeded on a confidential talk about the coming campaign, and plans for the disposal of the ladies. General St. Aure looked up in surprise, for he had fallen into a fit of brooding.

"What's all this? Whom are you talking about?"

"Oh, nothing, dear," said his wife; "only a little piece of romance Jim has been unravelling. It's about that poor Mr. Armstrong. He was attached to one of Judge Brinton's family——"

The General's face lighted up, for he was as full of romance as a boy of twenty, though by no means observing of love symptoms outside of his own family.

"It's the dark one, Juliet—of course. He's a thin blonde, and she's a—well, fully formed brunette. Does she love him, Elsie? Poor girl!"

"I wouldn't pity her, Bertie," said Jim, drily. "She won't die of grief for him or any other man, if I know anything. It's the little one."

"What, that little girl, always flirting with some one?" asked St. Aure, indifferently. "I shouldn't say there was much in her."

"So I thought, dear," said Mrs. St. Aure in her gentle way, "till Jim brought her in to-day, and beckoned to me. Bertie, the little thing was dead in love with that poor boy, Armstrong, and yet she never shed a tear nor fainted when she heard he was dead, but held out before a crowd of strangers, while her cousin was making enough trouble to unsettle a quiet person like me, and all over an empty fright about Indians."

St. Aure looked interested, and Jim took up the story.

"Yes, and that's not the worst of it, Bertie. The cousin doesn't know it yet, and this one's got to break the news to her to-night, with the pleasant remembrance that Armstrong's supposed to be in love with Miss Juliet. How's that?"

St. Aure screwed up his face.

"It's bad, unless she has more generosity than most women."

Jim nodded his head, and puffed out a cloud of smoke as he growled:

"She has. She's as big an idiot as you or Elsie."

While the St. Aures were talking in Jim's quarters, the two girls sat in an upper room of the commandant's house, one of them weeping profusely, the other very white and still.

"Oh, Nettie," sobbed Juliet, abandoning herself to the luxury of woe, with all the facility of a lymphatic woman of strong emotional powers, "I can't believe it of poor Cornelius. Poor, poor Frank Armstrong! He was *so handsome*, and he loved *me* so dearly! I don't know what

I shall do, never to see him again! But poor Cornelius looks just as sorry too. He was poor Frank's friend, you know. You must be mistaken, Nettie. He never betrayed him."

"He left his friend—as *you* call him," said Nettie, in a low, monotonous voice, with firm set lips, "to be killed by savages, while he returned to court *you*."

"And could the poor fellow help it?" asked Juliet, with a fresh burst of sobs. "I know poor Frank loved me, but so did Cornelius, and I don't—don't—don't see why you should speak so harsh—harsh—harshly of your and my cousin, because he didn't get—killed."

And Juliet rocked herself to and fro, burying her face in her handkerchief.

Nettie sat up very straight in her chair, and her eyes began to flash.

"And so, I suppose, Mr. Armstrong being killed, you will end by marrying his rival, Cornelius Van Dyck," she said, slowly.

Juliet burst into a fresh tempest of sobs.

"Oh, Nettie, how can you talk so, and poor F-f-f-frank not buried yet? You're only a child, and you d-d-don't know what l-l-love is, or you wouldn't be so heartless."

Nettie gave a little smile, which had the effect of a writhing contortion.

"As you say, I am only a child, Juliet. I don't know what love is, but I've been a friend to you and Armstrong, and I've helped you both to deceive Aunt Isabel, and I've been your confidante ever since I came from school, when he—gave me—the only thing I ever had from him."

Here she stopped and remained staring, wide-eyed, out of the window, as if lost in thought.

Juliet went on sobbing at intervals, in her rocking chair.

"*I suppose it's* because I take a great interest in the

first love affair I ever was engaged in," said Nettie, presently, in a sort of dreary, far-away tone; "but I feel as if I couldn't bear to see you leave the lion for the calf, Juliet. Promise me you won't marry Cornelius, darling, at least until we are certain poor Armstrong is dead. Wait a year, Juliet, for *his* sake."

Juliet put down her handkerchief.

"What—and have all the p-p-people saying I was mourning for a lover?" she asked, with a sob. "Oh, Nettie, what would Aunt Isabel say?"

Nettie tossed her little head scornfully.

"I'd let her say it, if he had loved *me* as he loved *you*, Juliet."

Juliet turned on her with sudden coherence.

"He didn't, miss. That's certain."

Nettie turned, if possible, paler than before, and shrank back, as if her cousin had struck her.

"No, Jule, no—I didn't mean," she stammered; "but you have so many to love you—and I—I have no one at all, and I only supposed—if—if—oh, Jule, you're so beautiful, they all love you, and I'm so little and thin no one cares for me. Don't be cruel to me, dear. I've always stood your friend, haven't I?"

"Yes," said Juliet, condescendingly; and then burst into a fresh fit of weeping. "Oh, Nettie, what shall I do? I can't die—die—die an old—old—maid."

Again Nettie shrank back, but her face took a new expression this time.

"Jule," she said, slowly, "when he went away, he left a letter with me. Do you care to hear it?"

Juliet started and flushed.

"A letter! Frank! With you! How did he dare?"

Nettie smiled sadly.

"No, no, don't be jealous, Jule. He was faithful

enough to you, God knows. Perhaps more than you'll ever be to him. The letter is to you, under cover to me."

Juliet turned her head, and looked out from under her half-closed lids at Nettie.

"He told me he had promised papa not to write to me," she said, in her softest tones.

Again Nettie smiled, in her sad, dreary fashion.

"He knew I was his friend," she said, simply; "and he wrote to me, asking me to read the letter to you. Frank Armstrong never broke his word, and I will not break mine. Will you hear the letter? I have not opened it yet."

Juliet turned to her handkerchief afresh.

"I suppose you m-m-must," she sobbed. "It will only be a f-f-fresh heart-break for m-m-me, but I owe it to him. G-go on, Nettie. Don't spare my f-f-feelings."

Nettie looked at her in the most tender and compassionate manner. The poor little girl believed devoutly in her handsome cousin's soft heart, and pitied her.

"Oh, Juliet, don't let me distress you," she began, in her impulsive way. "If you'd rather not hear the letter, I'll keep it to myself. But think how *he* would grieve if he knew I had neglected his dying wish. Perhaps his poor body now lies out on the prairie, hacked to pieces by those wicked wretches Mrs. St. Aure told me of—and he—perhaps he sees us now."

Juliet shuddered and glanced nervously round the room.

"Don't, Nettie, don't. You make my flesh creep. Go on with the letter quickly. Let's get it over. Oh, you know I can't bear pain. Why do you dawdle so, you selfish girl?"

The adjuration had a good effect on Nettie, for it brought her down from the high pitch on which her feelings were strung. She slowly opened the bosom of her

riding habit, and pulled forth a square letter, which she handed to Juliet with a little shudder.

The elder girl, amid all her sobs and lamentations, contrived to keep a keen lookout on Nettie; and observed, as she pulled out the letter, that something bright, attached to a slender black chain and caught in the envelope, fell out from her dress and hung down a moment, when Nettie, with a hasty motion, pushed it back out of sight. Then Juliet turned once more to her handkerchief.

"I can't read it—you wretched girl—I daren't read it. You're afraid to look at it."

"No, Juliet, *I'll* read it," said Nettie firmly, while for some reason a faint color burned in her cheek.

She took the letter from Juliet's passive fingers, and read the superscription in a low tone.

"It says, 'Not to be opened until my death or capture by the Indians,' Jule. Colonel St. Aure laughed at the poor fellow, but his foreboding has come true."

Juliet rocked and sighed for answer.

Then Nettie slowly opened the letter, with fingers that trembled slightly, and a second enclosure made its appearance.

"'To Nettie Dashwood, the best and truest friend man ever had,'" the girl read on the outside, and her face flushed pink with surprise and joy. Juliet, furtively watching her, asked with a sob:

"Is the address to me, Nettie?"

Nettie turned and spoke in a strange, deep, rich voice, quite unlike her ordinary tones.

"No, Jule, no; but he calls me 'the best and truest friend man ever had.' Oh, God bless my poor dead boy! God bless him!"

She displayed the first symptom of emotion that day, in a little dry sob, which she choked down instantly. Juliet *turned on* her fretfully.

"I wish you wouldn't keep me in torture, you selfish girl. Is this a time for a child like you to be giving way to her feelings? You don't care for what *I* feel, one bit."

Nettie hurriedly opened the letter, which was apparently long, and spread it out before her cousin. As she did so, out dropped a lock of brown hair, and Nettie pounced on it like a tigress.

"It's mine, Jule—it's mine!" she panted out. "I've not much—not much, but he sent his friend one last lock to show he had not *quite* forgotten her."

Juliet had not said a word, but sat with her face half hidden by the handkerchief. A cool observer would have noticed that her eyes wore a watchful expression, but poor Nettie was in no condition to observe any one, least of all the cousin she had reverenced as a sort of goddess, since the raw, unformed schoolgirl had seen Juliet as queen of the ball at West Point. Ever since that day Nettie had been a blind adorer, and she failed to understand her own feelings now, as she hugged the little curl of hair to her breast.

Juliet spoke very coolly and decidedly, the last simulated sob having vanished from her voice.

"If I were you, I would read the letter. You don't know yet *to whom* that hair was sent."

Then Nettie trembled all over, and began to plead, with a white, haggard face.

"Let me keep it, Jule—let me keep it—at least a little bit! I've nothing to remember him by——"

Juliet interrupted her with a quiet wave of the hand. She had stopped sobbing entirely.

"Read the letter," she said. "Then we shall see. If you can't read it, give it to me."

Nettie hastily thrust the little lock of hair into her bosom, and again spread out the letter. Then she began to read, in a clear, low tone. Now and then she paused and

drew in her breath with a sort of shiver at some passage, then set her teeth and read on, as if desperately resolved to get through. The letter ran thus:

FORT MARENGO, Aug. 13th, 18—.

MY TRUE AND DEAR LITTLE FRIEND:

I am going to start on a long and dangerous expedition to-night, one from which I have made a vow never to return, except to be thanked in orders. If I thought any one but you would see this while I am alive, I would not write it, for I hate boasting; but you know why I long to distinguish myself, alive or dead, for the sake of Juliet, my guiding star.

Here Juliet smiled triumphantly. Nettie went on as if she had not noticed anything.

I have resolved to volunteer for the most dangerous service to be found, and to penetrate into the heart of the Indian camp, if I can. General St. Aure did so once, with a few men, and ended a war by his prompt decision and diplomacy. If I get out alive, I shall be promoted; if I do not come back within a month, you will never see me again, in all probability. Van Dyck is a very good fellow, but I doubt if he'll come with me, and I shall not blame him for his caution. If I were as rich as he, and Juliet Brinton's neighbor, the army would not see me here long.

As it is, I have a road to carve, and it lies amidst the thorns of adversity. I must take a heavy risk to secure a heavy prize, but I have confidence in my destiny, unless I am cut off before I work it out.

I write this to you, who are my true friend, and know me as no one else does. Nettie, when I am gone, promise me you will tell Juliet how I loved her. She is so bright and beautiful, and has so many to love her, that I am nothing in comparison; but you know, Nettie, how I have loved her from the time when I was a penniless cadet, and you first helped me to approach her. Do you remember, little friend, how you and I met at the ball, and how you begged that button from me, and how I got into a scrape about it, next day, at guard-mount, and how you came to me when I was on post on that hot afternoon, and what a talk we had? Ah, Nettie, you were an innocent little thing in those days, but you stuck to me like a good friend, and I shall never forget you for it. I wish you were a man *sometimes, little* one, for we'd make a true pair of comrades.

Here Juliet began to look sidewise at Nettie with a trange expression in her eyes.

But I am rambling on about old times, when I should be settling ny affairs. Nettie, I have left my will with Colonel St. Aure, and ıe has promised to execute it for me. I want to send my sword to ny poor mother, and some little things that I have left with him to ny family. To you I confide the most sacred trust of all, because I now you will keep it faithfully. Take the lock of hair that I place ıere, my dear friend, and give it to Juliet. Tell her that my last vaking thought was of her, that my last word was her name, that ny whole life was bound up in her, and that, living or dead, I shall ove her. Long years hence, Nettie, when you are the happy and ıonored wife of some good and brave man, think sometimes of me, ınd speak of me to *her*, as one who, whatever his faults, tried to be- ome worthy of a noble lady, by winning a name that she might not lisdain to wear. Good-by, little friend. You will grieve for a while, ıut, thank God, you do not yet know what it is to love, hopelessly, ıs I have, one I can never gain. When you read this to her, tell her hat it is the last time she or you will ever hear of

FRANK ARMSTRONG.

Then at last Nettie stopped, and the letter fell on her ap, while she sat looking blankly on the world outside the window. Her lips were moving softly, but she did not speak aloud.

As for Juliet, she began to sob again with fresh vehemence, but this time Nettie never noticed. The girl seemed to be wrapped in a deep and thrilling reverie, not altogether painful, for a sort of half smile was on her face as she looked out on the sky.

Then Juliet's fretful voice broke in on her, and startled her back to earth.

"Why don't you give me the lock of his poor dear hair, you selfish girl? I told you he sent it to me, and you are trying to keep it. He loved *me*, and *only me*, to the last. Give me the curl; it is mine."

Then Nettie Dashwood suddenly rose to her feet, trembling all over, and pulled from her bosom that poor little

lock of hair. Her cousin rose likewise; and the two girls, for the first time that evening, looked in each other's eyes.

"Give me the curl," said Juliet imperiously, and then a strange look came into the other girl's face. "Give me the curl," said Juliet again. "He loved me—*me*—ME, you treacherous girl! Do you hear me? You were nothing to him, though you tried to steal him from me. Give me the curl."

She extended her hand with a commanding gesture, and then suddenly paused, rooted to the floor with astonishment and fear.

Nettie, who had been standing, white and trembling, in the middle of the room, suddenly threw up her clenched hands and fell over backward on the carpet, where she lay quite still, as if dead.

Then Juliet, who had been so cool in the contest of ideas, became powerless in the presence of physical danger. She rushed to the door shrieking for help, just as the General and his wife entered the house from their visit to Jim St. Aure, and a few minutes later Mrs. St. Aure was upstairs, kneeling by the unconscious girl, whose hands were still tightly clenched, while her teeth were rigidly set.

The servants were called, and Nettie was removed to another room and put to bed, still white and unconscious, stiff and rigid, while Juliet, wringing her hands with much effusion, hung around her, very much in everybody's way. Presently up came Miss Lacy with the post-surgeon. The doctor no sooner set eyes on the girl than he looked grave.

"Pressure on the brain—nerves overwrought. Must have quiet. Brain fever coming on," he said, in a low tone, to General St. Aure. "Can't be moved for I don't know how long; too bad just at this moment. What's to be done?"

The General looked worried.

"And we start to-morrow morning. We *must* move her somehow. The Judge is going back."

This conference took place in the passage, the sick-room door being shut. It was opened softly, and Mrs. St. Aure came out.

"The young lady is very ill, is she not, Dr. Yunger?" she said, in her soft, low tones.

"She has brain fever coming on, superinduced by some shock," said the doctor. "If it were not for her family, I should say leave her where she is. Moving her would kill her certainly."

"She shall stay," said Mrs. St. Aure, in her quiet, resolute way. "I will nurse her myself, doctor, for she belongs to *us* now."

The doctor looked puzzled.

"Never mind explanations. I mean it. Bertie, dear, you know how lonely I am when you are away. This child has been sent to give me occupation and keep me from brooding. You must get her uncle to go home and leave her with me to nurse her."

"The very thing," said the doctor, in a tone of relief. "If you will take the burden, Mrs. St. Aure, along with that old lady—I think she's good stock—we can dispense with the Judge and that sanguine daughter of his."

The end of the matter was that, next morning, when the bugle sounded the rollicking notes of "the general," and the men began to turn out from the barracks and camp on the plain outside, while Marengo was full of the bustle of troops off for campaign and citizens in a hurry to catch the eastward train, Judge Brinton and his daughter, the latter in tears, the former full of nervous haste, were at the door in an ambulance, while Madam Lacy, wrapped in a shawl, was sitting in an upper room by the bedside of poor Nettie, who was tossing to and fro in a hot fever, her little hands as tightly clenched as ever.

Mrs. St. Aure was down stairs, bidding farewell to her husband; the fort was a scene of bustle and excitement from one end to the other; but up in that darkened chamber nothing was audible but the low mutterings of the sick girl, while the old lady sat bolt upright by the bedside, her lips slightly compressed, the picture of coolness and vigilance.

Nothing escaped her eyes, and she was at the moment watching her unconscious niece very narrowly. Something bright and small, attached to a dark chain, was tossing to and fro on Nettie's breast, as she rolled her head from side to side in the delirium of pain, and the old lady had tried more than once to see what it was.

At last she put out her hand to touch it as the girl lay still for a moment, and uttered a slight cry of surprise as her fingers closed on it.

"Humph!" muttered Miss Lacy to herself. "What does she want with *that* thing?"

She heard the bugles outside sounding a long, clear call, and then the band struck up the "Star Spangled Banner." In spite of herself, the old lady left the bedside and went to the window, when she drew up the blind and looked out.

The whole of the Twelfth Cavalry was marching out of Fort Marengo, followed by two bright brass guns and two companies of infantry; General St. Aure, in his buckskin suit and broad white hat, riding ahead of the column, like the embodiment of the equestrian idea, Dandy prancing and curvetting as if he knew he was the centre of all eyes.

It was a gallant sight, but Miss Lacy turned away from it in terror, as she heard a cry from the bed.

Poor, crazed Nettie had heard the band, and had risen up, wild-eyed, crying:

"*Frank, Frank*, don't go; don't leave me!"

Miss Lacy, with prompt decision, forced her back into bed, but not without something of a struggle, in which for the first time since she had fallen the night before, the poor child unclenched her hands, and beat weakly at her relative. At last she fell back, panting, and looked up at Miss Lacy, saying:

"I know you. You wanted to part us, but he loves me best. See what he gave me."

She snatched at the chain round her neck, and as she did so, the thin hair broke, while the little bright object rolled on the floor.

A step was heard in the passage, and Mrs. St. Aure, her eyes red as if from recent weeping, entered the room as the delirious girl shook the little chain in the air, repeating:

"*He* gave it to me, he gave it to *me*: it's *all mine*, and Jule can't have it."

Then she burst into a shrill laugh and fell back, while her head rolled to and fro with the same restless motion, and the aimless muttering began again. Miss Lacy stooped to the floor and picked up the little bright object that had fallen from the chain. She looked puzzled, and whispered to Mrs. St. Aure:

"What is it? I don't understand why she keeps this."

Mrs. St. Aure took it and looked at it with her eyes filling with tears.

"Poor child," she said. "Don't you know what it is? Only a cadet's button, and she has kept it all these years."

Madam Lacy started.

"And I thought—I thought it was Juliet."

Mrs. St. Aure smiled sadly.

"So did I, but we are both undeceived now."

CHAPTER XIX.

AN ABANDONED VILLAIN.

A BROAD and magnificent valley at the junction of two noble streams. Standing on the bluffs on the north bank of the great Yellowstone, was a tall man in full Indian costume, the lofty eagle-plumes of his war-bonnet towering above his head and sloping down his back, ending in a tuft of horsehair that trailed on the ground behind him. The tall man was evidently a chief, from the general richness of his buckskin dress, which was moreover ornamented, in a way very unusual among Indians, with gold lace, and fastened by gilt buttons. There was an absence of incongruity about this man's dress that spoke of civilizing influences, and yet his face was thoroughly Indian—aquiline, square-jawed, keen-eyed, the embodiment of that perceptive faculty united to pitiless resolution, that makes the face of the tiger so terribly beautiful. This Indian chief had all the sinuous grace of the tiger in his lithe body and his long, sweeping movements when he shifted his position, as he did every now and then, for he was conversing with another man and pacing up and down on the summit of the bluff.

The second man wore the tasselled woollen cap and coarse frock and leggings common to those Canadian-French guides, traders, hunters and trappers who roam the plains of the North-west from Hudson's Bay to Oregon, giving way to the American frontiersmen in all but the extreme northern territories of the United States. His *face and figure*, however, were not French, but those of

the old Highlander, philologist and fur trader, Evan Roy Mac Diarmid.

Before them one could see the valleys of two great rivers stretching out, green and smiling, for at least thirty miles each way, a carpet of bright emerald green covering the ground, from the water's edge to the perpendicular brown bluffs and steep mountains, covered with dark pine forests, on each side. The valleys seemed to be perfect paradises of plenty, for both were dotted with dark herds of buffaloes, grazing quietly and merging into each other from time to time, as if they felt secure from disturbance.

And yet, there, on the opposite side of the river, not five miles from the nearest herd, was a great Indian village, the groups of lodges standing irregularly, but scattered along the valley for more than a mile, while a herd of horses was feeding almost within sight of the buffaloes.

The camp seemed to be quiet and marked by no special movement, a few figures straying about here and there, others basking in the sun.

"'Tis a bonny sicht, Mac Diarmid," said Evan Roy, with a sweep of his hand over the prospect, "and gars a mon to wush that the puir bodies had houses and cattle to live comfortably in the winter, instead of huddlin' wi' the fleas in their dirty teepees, when the snaw comes."

Mac Diarmid—for the Indian chief was none other—turned his glowing eyes on Evan.

"Have civilization and comfort done so much for them that they should love them?" he asked bitterly. "You want houses and cattle for these poor people. How long would they have them here, before the Yankees would move in and steal the land? They are better off as they are."

Evan tossed his head slightly.

"Yes, while the summer lasts. They're like the beasts of the field in a' but ane thing. They canna follow the summer like *them.*"

"And why not?" asked the young chief fiercely. "Once they could and did follow the summer, from the Lake of the Woods down to the forks of the Cimarron, with none to say them nay. They lived as their fathers lived; fought as their fathers fought, and they were happy. Then came *my father's* race—yes, Evan, I know it all—he thought to save me from what he called 'barbarism,' so he recognized his Indian wife as an equal, and had us educated in the ways of the whites. I have learned all they know, and more besides from my mother, and what good is it to me now? Does it prevent my sister from being shunned like a pariah by the women of a parvenu province, because, forsooth, she is a *half-breed?* No, Evan, my father's race ruined my mother's people, and I can at least help them to die fighting."

Evan shook his head discontentedly.

"And why suld ye, Mac Diarmid? Yer faither was a Hieland chief and yer mither a Blackfoot woman; and what hae ye to do here amang the Dakotas?"

"Hark ye, Evan," said Mac Diarmid gravely. "You say true, these are not of my tribe; but they are of my race and color. My tribe—thanks to disease and war—has vanished from the territory of this *just* republic, and the remnant is safe under the shadow of the British flag. But I am set apart as the avenger of all my race, and I have sworn to my mother that I will not rest till her race is united in war against the thieves who have stolen our fair lands, foot by foot, and who never yet kept their word."

"Ye've read history to very little purpose, Mac Diarmid," said Evan Roy, "gin ye dinna remember what befell King Philip and Pontiac and Tecumseh. All failed, and all *will* fail, when barbarians strive against civilized brains. Ye'll no mak a league, and gin ye mak a league 'twill *break* to pieces the first strain."

"*I'll try it*, anyway, Evan," said the chief firmly.

I've not studied history in vain, spite of what Father de aunay and you think of me. If West Point has done othing else for me, it has taught me the value of light avalry, well handled."

He broke off to look up at the sun.

"It is almost the hour," he said. "It is time that we rossed the river. There is no change in the conditions, nd fatigue will begin to tell on the dancers if Yellow iver is not watched."

Evan Roy laughed.

"Eh, mon, but ye hae the wusdom o' baith sides o' the oose; and the folly's a' frae the mither. Gin ye'd give p the idea of fighting, and tak to trade, ye micht double he fortune the Mac Diarmid left ye, and carry the half- reed to the top of the heap, in ony city in the States."

Mac Diarmid smiled slightly.

"I may do that yet, Evan. I'll not be beaten always, ou may be sure. Come."

The two descended the bluffs toward the river and rossed the green flats, passing some of the herds of buf- alo, which got out of their way and stared stupidly at hem as they passed. To a novice the sight of these terri- le-looking black beasts, with their fiery eyes and shaggy anes, would have been sufficiently discomposing, but the wo men did not seem to mind it. As for the buffalo, they ould stand and stare till they caught the scent of the wo intruders, when they would gallop off, shaking their eads and snorting, so that a broad line opened itself be- ween the men and the water, on each side of which stood line of shaggy monsters, staring, but not offering to at- ack.

"There is another proof of the value of your civiliza- ion, Evan," said the chief sarcastically, as he pointed to he buffaloes. "Suppose yonder village was an encamp- nent of United States soldiers, how long would these ani-

mals stay? They would be hunted for very wantonness, that some youngster might parade a number of tails, till they were frightened away. Here, where the *barbarians* you despise live on them entirely, they know enough to protect their game, and kill only what they require for food, without frightening the rest."

"I'll no deny that," said Evan condescendingly. "The puir bodies hae naething else to do but hunt, and gin they were na expert at it, the Lord save them. Ye'll come back to auld civilization yet, Mac Diarmid. Mark my words."

The young chief shook his head a little angrily.

"Not till the desert fails me altogether."

Then they came to the river bank, where lay on the shore one of those large circular boats, made of willow rods and covered with a bull's hide, common among the plains Indians and trappers by the name of "bull boats." On the edge of this boat lay a long white buffalo robe, covered with strange devices, which Mac Diarmid immediately threw over his shoulders, after which he and Evan launched the light boat, stepped in, and began to pole across the broad but shallow stream.

"I'll aye maintain," remarked Evan as they pushed off, "that these bull boats are but anither pruif that the Celt or Cymry and the Red man of the plains are the same. What is this, Mac Diarmid, but the self-same coracle with whilk the ancient Picts and Britons navigated their rivers, and whilk they still use on the Tweed and the Severn?"

Mac Diarmid smiled.

"Philology and ethnology will land you in a lunatic asylum yet, Evan, if we ever get back to civilization."

It was observable in Mac Diarmid that he, whose thoughts and language had been so poetical and full of desert similes when in New York, was now talking like a *civilized* person, while surrounded by savagery.

In truth, it was hard to tell which side of his nature

would come to the surface at a given moment. His father had been a poor Highland lad, son of a chief whose chieftainship had vanished with the poetry of Highland life, but who kept up the memory of former imaginary glories with all the more fervor, because he had been forced into trade from his earliest years. A factor at a lonely trading post of the Hudson's Bay Fur Company, living among Indians from his boyhood, it was no wonder that he had taken to himself an Indian woman. From leaving her and abandoning his children, John Mac Diarmid had been prevented by two things. He was a superstitious Roman Catholic of the old Jacobite stamp, like his father before him; moreover, a Jesuit missionary had married him to the daughter of the head war-chief of the Blackfeet, in the days when the Blackfeet were a grand and powerful tribe, dreaded by the American Fur Company, but at peace with the French and Scotch traders of the British corporation.

Whatever may be said against the polity of the Roman Church, it has always exhibited two practically good features in its management—the success of its missionaries, and the sanctity with which it surrounds the institution of marriage. Had the elder Mac Diarmid been anything but a superstitious Papist—or perhaps a Moslem—he would in all probability have deserted his Indian wife when he had amassed wealth, and have left his children to starve, or fight for their own living. Indian tribes all over the plains are to-day full of such widows and orphans, abandoned victims of "civilized" lust, as trapper, trader or hunter goes back to the town and leaves his Indian companion behind him. John Mac Diarmid, being an ignorant papist, was foolish enough to think his wife had a claim on him; so he took her and his children to the United States, where he bought land in New York city, in the days *when* Canal street was a ditch and the Bowery

ran through the fields. Scotch, Canadian, or Yankee by turns, as he saw a chance to turn an honest penny, the thrifty Highlander kept on his annual journeys to the plains and grew rich almost without knowing how, as his land ventures became suburban and urban in rapid succession, and the modest little seventy-acre farm began to represent a thousand building lots. Then indeed he had no trouble to find an accommodating man of politics, through whom he could realize his darling wish, by sending his son to West Point; and that once accomplished, the old trader sank to his rest, dreaming sweet visions of a house refounded and the Mac Diarmids as merchant princes of the olden times, ruling savage tribes with a stroke of the pen; chiefs on the prairie, and courtiers in the city. The French blood in his veins—for grandfather Mac Diarmid had taken a French wife in his Canadian home—had much to do with these romantic visions, such as used to animate Frontenac and the impoverished French nobles who founded on the banks of the St. Lawrence that New France which fell to pieces at the touch of Wolfe's sword. Such as they were, Highland-French-Indian; tutored by Jesuit missionaries, Indian sages, and the old Highland clansman—the last of his race—the two Mac Diarmid children had grown up apart from the world, shunned where they were known as half-breeds; stared at as "furriners" where their dark faces were not recognized; with a morbid pride in their singular lineage, and a morbid fear of revealing it to strangers; till the young man went to West Point, and began to read American history, with its record of all that concerns the red race.

He had already learned languages, and so much of European history as comes to light in novels, such as those of Scott and Dumas. He could name the kings of England and France without hesitation; but West Point gave *him the facts* of modern, and especially of American his-

ory. Naturally, he turned with interest to all that concerned his mother's race, and read the pathetic tale of the chief after whom he himself was named. He read of the Indians welcoming to their shores with gifts those pious Pilgrims who, in less than fifty years, had exterminated every Indian in New England whose land was worth stealing. He looked at the map, covered with Indian names, and thought that of all the race that once roamed the continent from the Atlantic to the Mississippi, not a tribe remained intact. He read of the long struggle of the Seminoles in Florida, where a handful of dirty, half-naked barbarians defied for years all the forces of a great nation; and—being only a half-breed—he was foolish enough to sympathize with the "painted varmints," as the frontiersmen call them. He found recorded in American history the fact that this Seminole war was ended by an act of "policy" on the part of the whites, who invited forty Seminole chiefs to a conference, and then made them prisoners; and he further found that the officer who planned his piece of "policy" was afterward made President of the United States. He turned to page after page of history, and found nothing but the record of violated treaties, broken faith, and ultimate extermination to every Indian tribe that dealt with the American government.

Then the bad blood of John Logan Mac Diarmid boiled up, and he grew hard and bitter within himself, until he went home on furlough and examined the history of the same Indians in contact with the Canadian government. He found that the French had always been able to get along with the Indians; and that the same English who had been so cruel and rapacious when left to themselves in the United Colonies, had, in inheriting the French Dominion of Canada by the right of the sword, nevertheless learned of their old foes how to govern Indians, so that, throughout the British-American provinces, after the cap-

ture of Quebec, Indian and white had lived in amity, and wars had been unknown.

Then it was that Mac Diarmid formed a very strange and wicked resolution, worthy of his mixed blood, and which he was now carrying out. His own tribe being safe in British territory, he determined to organize a league of the northern tribes of plains Indians in the United States, with which to make a grand struggle for what he called "independence or revenge."

A wild scheme and a diabolical one, no doubt, as everybody will admit; but then the ugly Indian blood was up in him, and he had all the bad feelings of two races to make him revengeful, without that philosophic turn of mind which enables the Anglo-American to discourse calmly on the "manifest destinies of superior, and the necessary subordination of inferior races." People used to talk in the same strain about another rather ill-used race before the year 1861, in a certain portion of the United States; but for some reason the rest of the world would not agree with the conclusions of the superior race, and the impracticable ideas of certain crack-brained philanthropists were allowed to dominate politics, even to the extent of paying for two hundred years of injustice by four years of blood-shedding and treasure-spending.

Residents of territories near the Pacific railroad, army men who glory in "jumping ranches," "saving" more or less "bucks," and all those gentlemen who look upon Indians as wild beasts, without rights which civilization is bound to respect, are at liberty to skip the above remarks. They are only introduced to show into what a vilely perverted state of mind this wicked Mac Diarmid had worked himself, till he appears in this chapter as the full-fledged villain of our story. To form an idea of his *atrocious* character, it is necessary to remark that he had *heard debates* in Congress, read the police reports of every

great city in the Union, attended theatres while the anatomical drama was in the plenitude of its glory, and still preferred his squalid barbarism to decent and moral civilization. In fact, his biographer must confess to feeling shocked at his depth of depravity after so many bright and shining examples, and to experiencing a little fear whether the readers of this history will not regard such a being as an impossible monster.

And yet, candor compels the admission that the visits of Indian chiefs to the East have rarely produced appreciation in their minds of anything but the riches and power of civilization, without influencing them to much reverence of its superior morality; and John Logan Mac Diarmid, knowing the secrets of civilization, and not being awed by its powers, was therefore much like other Indians in his feelings, minus the respect exhibited by them for physical power and numbers. At West Point, he had taken special pleasure in studying the campaigns of Hannibal, Frederick, and the young Bonaparte, especially in those battles where, with a compact little force, they had conquered large numbers of enemies. He had a sort of a crazy notion—as most young soldiers have—that some day, when he got the chance, he might repeat these triumphs; and he had this in his favor, that he knew he could call to his aid a nation of horsemen, as formidable in single combat as the Mamelukes.

I must not forget one incident in describing the singular depravity of character of this misguided half-breed, which is that his earliest impressions of the civilization of which he had heard his father and Evan speak at the trading post, were formed at the town of Terminus, in a certain Western territory, where he arrived just as the Pacific railroad was finished to that point. He found the place full of very merry gentlemen who made their ostensible subsistence by *playing the* fascinating game of draw poker, and

who lived principally on the distilled juice of the harmless rye. These gentlemen were very much civilized in their weapons, which were always of the latest pattern, and which they used with a civilized freedom refreshing to see. The young half-breed, having assumed town costume, and being accompanied by Evan Roy, who was unmistakably white, escaped recognition as an Indian, and consequently became a silent and unnoticed spectator of several "difficulties" which occurred among the whites during the single evening which he spent in Terminus. Three gentlemen of the poker-playing persuasion were buried next morning, as they had died the night before, "with their boots on," and the lad—he was then only fourteen—gravely asked Evan whether the country was at peace or war.

He was answered by Colonel Abiram Jones, at that time on his way to San Elizario, Texas.

"You're a stranger, bub, to these parts, or you'd know that Terminus air jest the darndest, liveliest, sweetest little town in the hull civilized airth. There hain't a man died of sickness in this hyar place sence Jakey Saunders sot up the Grand Central Saloon, and thar won't be one as won't die with his boots on, till they move the railroad, next summer. We're jest the riptearingest fellers to spile Injun bucks and carry civilization inter the midst of the boundless preeries you ever seen; and you kin bet your boots that westward the star o' empire takes its way. That's so, sonny. Will yer smile?"

And the Colonel "smiled" with them.

Next day, as they were whirling to the East in a palace car, young Mac Diarmid, who was listening to Evan descanting on the glories of civilization and the squalors of savagery, suddenly posed the Highlander with the questions:

"*Is Colonel* Jones a savage or a gentleman? In what

is he any better than a savage, as you call us? Is that town we were in any better than the village of Standing Bear?"

After such absurd questions it is clear that no civilized person will waste any sympathy on this abandoned half-breed villain.

Such as he was, John Logan Mac Diarmid stood in the light bull boat, pole in hand, ferrying himself over the shallow and rapid Yellowstone. He was not a bad looking villain, which of course makes his crimes more atrocious. As he stood in the boat, his lithe, sinewy form swaying into all sorts of graceful curves, as he and Evan sent the little craft spinning across the shallows, he looked as handsome as Lucifer of the legend, to whom Miss Juliet Brinton had once compared him.

As the two friends neared the other side of the river a low buzzing arose in the camp, which had in fact been astir ever since they began to descend the bluffs. The teepees, lately so silent and deserted-looking, had been giving forth people, who were moving about, and some of them began to crowd down toward the river bank as if to meet the boat. For Indians, they were by no means so bad looking. They lacked the degraded air of the miserable outcasts who begged around the gate of Fort Marengo, and they were devoid of the incongruous mixture of finery that marked the Pawnee scouts of Armstrong's party. The women were decently and soberly attired in buckskin vests, skirts, and leggings, with their hair plaited in long tails on each side of the face. The men were splendid in their fringed buckskin hunting-shirts and lofty crested war-bonnets with scarlet streamers, while the fringes on their leggings and moccasins trailed on the ground. The children ran about with little or no clothing save the universal waistcloth and moccasins, but no one noticed them much.

Mac Diarmid and his companion landed, when the young chief drew his robe about him with a haughty air and raised his hand. Then, as he passed through their midst, the Indians fell in rear and followed him, as if they were curious to see what he would do.

CHAPTER XX.

MR. MEAGHER'S LITTLE GAME.

IN the midst of the Indian camp stood a great teepee, with perpendicular walls and a high-pitched roof beneath which several hundred persons could gather. It was entirely different from the ordinary conical teepee, and more like a circus tent. The outside of this lodge was covered with curious figures, painted on the light ground of the buffalo hides of which it was composed, and representing all sorts of fantastic scenes, with mythological monsters, birds, beasts, and men, mingled together in grotesque confusion.

This lodge stood on a knoll by itself, with no habitations near it, and as Mac Diarmid and his train entered it they heard a shrill whistling, mingling with the minor tones of a chant.

Within this singular edifice there was no furniture to be seen. A small fire burned in the centre, and high above it hung a rude little idol, formed of a block of wood and fashioned into a distant likeness to a human figure, whereof one side was painted black, the other white. As this strange looking fetish swung aloft, twirling slowly round and round in the current of hot air ascending from the fire, seen only by the dim light admitted through a small hole in the top of the structure, the smoke in the air increasing the gloom, there was something uncanny and unearthly in the aspect of the great medicine-teepee. Within a roped circle, about twenty feet in diameter in the centre, were a *dozen Indians, facing inward toward the idol, and mov-*

ing in a slow, measured dance around the ring. They were all naked save for a waistcloth, and each man held between his lips a small bone whistle with a feather from the medicine-bird fastened on the end of the tube. It was from these instruments that proceeded the singular sound Mac Diarmid had heard, for every one of the dancers was blowing with all the force he could muster, while the ceaseless chant of the warriors and women outside united to produce the impression of some weird incantation.

Mac Diarmid entered and pressed his way to the front of the crowd. All the outside of the tent was packed with people, and the heat was fearful. The naked bodies of the dancers were shining and dripping with sweat, their faces set in a sort of religious ecstasy, and still they circled slowly round with the measured stamp of the Indian dance, their eyes unceasingly fixed on the ugly fetish that hung from the roof. There they had been now, as Mac Diarmid knew, without rest or sleep, for three days and nights, and the medicine-dance was drawing to a close.

The chief stood silently watching the whole proceeding in the midst of a line of powerful Indians, who stood around the roped enclosure as guards to keep back the people. A stern and scornful expression was on his face, for he felt a sense of shame for his race in their superstition. Presently he was accosted by another man, a strange figure with a yellow, wizened face. This man was attired in a fantastic costume, the skins of wild cats, opossums, and weasels disposed about him in a grotesque fashion that announced him as the medicine-chief.

"The chief from the land of the White Mother is welcome," said Yellow Liver, the medicine-man, with a cunning smile. "We are brothers."

Mac Diarmid waved him back, and spoke in a clear *voice, heard* all over the lodge.

"*It is time* the dance stopped. The medicine is good."

There was an immediate hush in the lodge, and men looked apprehensively at Mac Diarmid, as if they expected to see him struck dead for his presumption in interfering.

To their surprise the medicine-chief made no angry reply. He merely said:

"All have fallen but the Night Hawk, and he has never stopped. The medicine is very good."

"Then let it stop," said Mac Diarmid, and as he spoke he looked at the other in a peculiar way.

At that moment one of the dancers reeled and fell on his face, and a tremendous excitement arose in the teepee. Shrieks and yells took the place of the monotonous chant, and the crowd surged toward the ropes, to be met by the stern line of guards, who dragged the prostrate Indian from the teepee into the open air, surrounded by a yelling multitude.

"It is Night Hawk," muttered the wizard in a low tone to Mac Diarmid; and he passed through the crowd to where the exhausted dancer had been laid on the ground by the guards.

Then Yellow Liver proceeded to paint various mystic symbols on the prostrate body, muttering his incantations all the while, but still Night Hawk moved not, and lay like a dead man. No wonder, considering the fearful test to which he had been subjected, which none but the strongest warriors are called on to undergo, and then only once in their lives, for no warrior is expected to dance the medicine-dance twice.

As he still lay inanimate, Yellow Liver's face grew anxious, and he said: "Turn him over. It may be the bad god has triumphed."

They turned the exhausted man on his back, and his eyes were set half open, while the froth had gathered on his lips.

"Throw water on him," commanded the wizard.

He was obeyed with alacrity, and under the successive shocks, as jar after jar of cold water struck the body, Night Hawk shivered slightly, and tried to rise.

Instantly Yellow Liver was surrounded by a circle of the near relatives of the dancer, imploring the wizard's mercy, for it was feared that he might order the exhausted man back to the ring, and in such a case there is no appeal from the word of the medicine chief.

Yellow Liver hesitated and cast a glance toward Mac Diarmid, then advanced and spoke, so as to be heard by all.

"The medicine is good. The dance is over."

There was a tremendous outburst of yells and cries of joy, while Night Hawk's friends carried him off in triumph to his lodge, to be petted and caressed by all as the hero who had stood out the longest of any in the medicine-dance of the year. To understand the joy exhibited, it must be remembered that the policy of all the assembled bands was to be settled by the result of this mystic dance. Where a man dies under the extraordinary exertions, it is a token that the bad god, whose image is propitiated, is inexorably angry with the people, and resolved to punish them; in which case every confederation is annihilated, and the bands scatter to escape the ill luck promised.

At the command of the Wizard, Yellow Liver, the other dancers, still circling within the teepee and all reeling with fatigue and vertigo, were carried away, while the people rushed at the magic temple to pull it down as usual.

Here Yellow Liver interfered.

"Let it stand," he said. "The Gold Chief and Black Father have promised to make the medicine of the White Mother's land within the sacred lodge of the Dakota. *They* will come to-morrow, when the sun is up."

There was a low murmur of approval from the crowd.

Indians are like children, and they love show, pomp and glitter, as well as mystic rites. It was but a few days before that the party of Mac Diarmid had come into camp from the broad belt of free Indian country over the Canadian line, a route familiar to the Sioux, who draw much of their civilized supplies from that direction. They had been at once recognized as friends, the more so since they arrived loaded with presents for the chiefs, including ammunition, of which the Indians are so avaricious. The presence of Father de Launay was equally welcome, for the Indians have learned to respect the black stole of the priest, from experience of its harmless piety and charity.

The good father had invited them to attend mass, and the Indians were nowise loth, for the glittering robes and emblems of the Roman service have always been attractive to them. But Father de Launay was at a loss for a chapel in which to hold his service, until he learned that the annual medicine-dance was about to be celebrated, when he laid his plans with Mac Diarmid to utilize the temporary structure erected for that ceremony.

It was a partially redeeming characteristic of that abandoned half-breed villain that he had reverenced the priest from his early years, and he readily acquiesced in the plan of the enthusiastic missionary, who already dreamed dreams of converting thousands of savages and emulating St. Vincent de Paul. Mac Diarmid, who was a shrewd villain, knew that the medicine-chief of the tribe was open to bribery, and he soon had an understanding with him, so that the result of the medicine-dance was made certain from the first. Mac Diarmid's darling object was to engage the Sioux in an alliance, offensive and defensive, with his own tribe, and to secure war it was necessary to have "good medicine."

It must be confessed that this abandoned wretch had laid his plans well, even to the calculated splendor of his

personal appearance. He was already a favorite with the Indians, and the fact of his seeming power over the wizard of the camp gave an air of mystery to his surroundings that increased his power. Now he turned to the head chief of the concourse of bands that constituted the "hostiles"—so denominated by the government—and said in a low tone:

"Now is the time for the Standing Bear to speak."

The chief stepped forward to the door and announced in a loud voice that it was time for the warriors to retire; there would be a council that night at sunset. The effect of his words was immediate. The dignified chiefs and warriors wrapped themselves in their blankets, while the Gold Chief, as Mac Diarmid was called by the Sioux, followed by Evan Roy, stalked away; and very soon after the camp was empty of men to all appearance, they having retired to their lodges to meditate in preparation for the evening's council, much the same as civilized members of legislative bodies, who have important speeches to make "extempore" and require time to commit them.

Mac Diarmid entered his own lodge, and greeted Father de Launay.

"It is all right, Father. You can have the teepee for mass in the morning."

Then Father de Launay smiled with satisfaction. As for Evan Roy, he staid outside, for he saw something at the other end of the camp, and he hurried toward it with a manner of some uneasiness. The cause of his anxiety was a crowd of Indians gathered around several mounted figures; and as he drew near he distinguished white faces and dresses. This did not surprise him, for he knew that these Indians, while classed by the United States government under the name "hostiles," were frequently visited by *traders*, generally from the British Possessions, with whom *they were* perfectly friendly, and from whom they derived

their supplies of ammunition and rifles. His own party was only one of many, some white, some half-breeds, that had visited the Indian camp that summer.

Evan parted the crowd with little difficulty, for it was composed of the rabble of the camp, the chiefs and warriors being already in their lodges, as he knew. He approached the strangers, however, with some surprise, for he observed in their midst the black stole of a priest.

"Now there'll be bonny wark," muttered Evan. "Wi' two priests and a conjuror, the deil himself will be proud to join the party."

It will be noticed that our good Evan, while perfectly moral in his conduct, was not very respectful concerning religious rites, perhaps because he had seen them associated with so much deep policy in the person of Monsieur de Launay.

He came up to the strange priest, and looked at him narrowly, while the Indians were crowding round.

"He's a foxy chiel," muttered Evan, "and his mon's a braw laddie for a priest's body-sairvant."

The party he was looking at was composed of a tall, thin young priest, with red hair, a long nose, and keen, greenish-gray eyes; followed by a handsome young fellow, in rusty-black clothes and a shovel hat, whose semi-clerical costume sat awkwardly on him. The priest was mounted on a mule and the young man was on foot, leading a pack-animal; while two plainsmen of the ordinary character stood near by, leaning against their horses. The Indians were treating the party with great curiosity, not to say impudence; for the women and children who were around were restrained by no courtesy, and the few young men present were of no character or dignity. They were commenting with great freedom on the sorry appearance of the priest and his servant, and as yet no one had come forth to take them into a lodge; the mystery being explained by the

fact that this party had approached unperceived, save by the scouts of the camp, who had accompanied them, and were now reporting their presence to higher quarters.

Evan's Highland notions were touched, and he went forward, at once attracting the notice of all the party. The priest, in fact, had looked a little uneasy at the insults of the Indians, and seemed to be relieved by the appearance of Evan.

"Oh, sir, I rejoice to see you," he cried. "I am Father Innocent, of the Order of Jesus, and I was given to understand that the wildest tribes would treat our people with respect, yet here we are in your camp, and no man has bid us welcome."

"Ye suld have sent word ye were coming," said Evan, quietly. "Ye ken that in the desert ilka mon's a foe till he pruives a frien'. Wha's yer frien's yonner?"

"My assistant and companion, the licentiate Peter, and my two guides," said the priest, glibly. "We shall be grateful to you for your help, sir."

"Hae ye brocht presents for the chiefs and head men o' the band?" demanded Evan, cautiously.

"Certainly. They are packed on the mule."

"And ye ken the language of the tribe?"

"A few words, sir. I fear I must trust to an interpreter to do the most of my business—the guide Fardeau."

Evan pursed up his lips and whistled under his breath as he regarded the other; while the Indians, who had stopped to gape at the conversation, once more began to sneer and jibe at the priest.

Evan caught something of what they were saying, and so did the two guides, for all three were conversant with the language of the Indians. The priest looked round him, and as he scanned the mocking or menacing faces, he appeared still more uneasy. As for his young con
he had said nothing all the time, but stood by h

mule, apparently indifferent to all that was passing. Then the priest pressed closer to Evan, saying, in a low tone:

"Sir, you are white, at least. Tell me what they are saying about us."

"They're girnin' at ye," said Evan, gravely; "and I wadna be surprised gin ye were to get a stane alangside the head, in anither minute. Ye kem frae the wrang side o' camp to be a frien', they say. Hae ye said yer prayers?"

Then the priest's countenance changed, and the traces of uneasiness vanished. He turned to his young friend, and spoke firmly and quietly.

"Well, Peter, it seems we are to be martyrs. Let us not disgrace our cloth. The game will be up, unless we can find a chief soon."

Here the two guides, who had been standing quietly by, saying and doing nothing, roused themselves from their apathy, and sprang on their horses.

"The varmints will go fur us in another minute, Mr. Meagur," said Colorado Charley, briefly. "Either we've got to die, or git to that medicine-teepee. Air you ready for the teepee? The squaws'll t'ar yer to pieces."

Mark Meagher—for the priest was none other—looked doubtfully at his young attendant, who was on foot by the pack-mule.

"*He* will be killed any way," he said.

"Better one than all," said the young man himself at this juncture. "I shall not be hurt while this gentleman is here. *I know him.*"

Evan Roy looked astounded at the assertion, but was prevented from answering it by an immediate rush of all the women in camp, and the sudden scattering of the pretended priest's party. The two guides and Mark, spurring their animals, dashed through the crowd straight for the medicine-teepee, cutting with their whips at the women and children who tried to oppose them.

No sooner had they started, than the young man darted to Evan's side, and caught his arm, saying:

"You are Evan Roy. I charge you to take me to Mac Diarmid. He is my best friend."

Evan turned red with surprise, but at once acknowledged the claim, by waving away the attentions of the women, who seemed disposed to turn on the youth, but who forbore when they saw with whom he was.

"Come wi' me, whoe'er ye be," said Evan, stoutly. "Gin ye're a frien' o' the Mac Diarmid, Ise tak ye ower ta tap o' hell to see him."

The women fell back before them as they went toward Mac Diarmid's lodge, leading the pack-mule. All seemed to be going well, when the first warrior made his appearance, and advanced toward them, a stout fellow known by the name of "Hole-in-the-Face," from the ravages of small-pox in his countenance.

Hole-in-the-Face stepped before them as they neared the lodge of Mac Diarmid, and sternly inquired:

"Who is the Red Bull, that he should bring strangers into our camp? That man is an enemy, and must go to the women for sport."

Evan Roy as sternly replied:

"Step aside, Hole-in-the-Face. He is a friend of the Gold Chief. I take him thither."

Hole-in-the-Face was not satisfied.

"The Gold Chief is a stranger to us, and not of the Dakota nation," he said. "You must halt, and give up this man."

Evan said no more, but with a sudden motion he pushed violently at the throat of Hole-in-the-Face, giving at the same time a swing of his foot, so that he caught the other's leg behind the heel, and lifted it. Hole-in-the-Face came down on his back with a sounding whack, which *completely* demoralized him for the time being, for he had

o conception of the way in which the trick was done, hough it was simple in the extreme.

"Come," said Evan, hurriedly. "They'll be out in orce soon, and we'll no get off sae easy."

And he took his companion straight into the lodge of Mac Diarmid, before another warrior could make his appearnce.

Then came a hurried exclamation within the lodge:

"Armstrong! My God! What are you doing *here?*"

"I've come to your lodge because I knew you were ere, Mac," said young Armstrong coolly. "You'd told ne so often about your old henchman, Evan Roy, that I new him the moment I set eyes on him, and felt I was afe."

Mac Diarmid looked troubled and annoyed.

"I don't know that," he said gravely. "You are the oe of every man in this camp, and you have entered it in lisguise. You are a spy, and by the rules of war have orfeited your life."

Armstrong shook his head.

"Jack," he said quietly, "we were not chums at the ld Academy for four years that you should give me over o death. I am not *your* foe."

"What did you come here for?" asked Mac Diarmid n the same tones of gravity and annoyance.

"I came because I wanted to see an Indian tribe at ome; and because, if they will only listen to me, I hope o stop an Indian war, Jack."

The half-breed smiled derisively and answered:

"Do you hope they will listen to you? They have eard too many lies already from your cursed nation. What could they gain by listening to you?"

"They could gain peace and civilization," said the oung officer. "I know your prejudices, Jack, but you nust admit that these fellows here have done a great deal

to provoke the Government, and that if they would only go on a reservation they would be much better off than here, living from hand to mouth as they are."

"And what do you propose to do?" asked Mac Diarmid slowly. "You certainly have no powers to treat from the Government, and without those your mission is useless."

"No," said Armstrong eagerly. "Hear me, Jack, and see if I am so unreasonable. I have put my life in the balance to obtain peace, before that campaign begins which must terminate in ruin to all this tribe."

Mac Diarmid laughed low and sardonically.

"Perhaps. What do you propose to do to stop it?"

"I propose to ask one or more of these chiefs to come back with me and treat with General St. Aure. I will be responsible for their safety, and I am certain that no man can listen to the General without being convinced."

"And you think that you can make the tiger and the wolf lie down together in peace," said Mac Diarmid in an accent of bitter scorn. "Well, Armstrong, you're a fool and I'm another, but you shall have your chance. How did you get here?"

"Will you give me your word of honor to make no move to betray my companions if I tell you?" said Armstrong.

"They are safe for me," said Mac Diarmid, "but they are not under *my* protection; remember that. You are the only one of your cursed nation I will protect."

"Well then, they must take care of themselves," said Armstrong; and then he informed his friend of the capacity in which Mark Meagher visited the camp, and in what disguise he had come.

All this time Father de Launay had been hidden in the gloom of the lodge, reclining on a buffalo robe; but as *soon as he* heard who Mark Meagher was, and that he had

assumed the character of a priest, he started up and came forward in some excitement.

"But, my son," he said, "your party must be maniacs and worse, adding sacrilege to ignorance of danger. Are you not aware that the Propaganda never send out missionaries to the Indians unless they have stopped in some place to learn their language? This is a mad scheme and a wicked one on all your parts."

Mac Diarmid interrupted him gently.

"I have thought of a plan, Father, to save the lives of these madmen. They do not deserve it, but 'twould serve no one to kill them. They shall attend the council to-night."

Father de Launay look amazed.

"Impossible, my son. The Indians would never let them. They are safe for the present in the medicine-lodge, but they must starve to death there."

"Nevertheless," said Mac Diarmid, "I see a way to save them, if they are honest men. Follow me, Armstrong, and have no fear. I will protect you."

CHAPTER XXI.

REPORTING VERBATIM.

THE Indian camp was seething with excitement that night. The intelligence had flown abroad, and every man, woman, and child in the great village knew that four strangers had got into their lines, that one of them was sheltered by the Gold Chief, and that the other three had taken sanctuary in the medicine-teepee.

So long as they were there, as Colorado Charley had foreseen, no one would raise a weapon against them; but already a ring of guards was formed at a little distance from the medicine-teepee, who were to watch that the intruders did not escape. If nothing else could be done to them, it had been determined to starve them into death or surrender; and it needed no knowledge of the Indian languages to realize this fact. The venturesome "special" of the *Tabard* was as well convinced of it as either of the guides, who had both lived among the Sioux and understood their speech.

Mark Meagher was pacing up and down the teepee in silence, an anxious frown on his face, while the two guides were seated by the little fire in the centre, both smoking. The air was singularly oppressive, not a breath of wind stirring, and all three had thrown off their outer garments and were covered with sweat. It was already dusk, and they were entirely by themselves, for they had let their animals go as they rushed into the medicine-lodge. They could see from the door the silent circle of guards; and at *a little distance* outside a great fire had been kindled.

Mark stopped his uneasy pacing to and fro and watched the preparation of this fire. Presently he saw the Indians begin to gather round it, while a few, whose lofty head-dresses and grave, wrinkled faces announced them as chiefs or warriors of experience, took their seats in a circle. Then the soul of Mark Meagher rose in joy within him, and he spoke aloud, though in soliloquy:

"I told the boys I'd do it, and I've done it. I've attended an Indian council, and there's not another reporter within a thousand miles."

Colorado Charley, who had been puffing away at his old black pipe in silence by the fire, turned his head.

"Thar bean't no sorter doubt we're *hyar*, Mister Meagur, and ef ye want to see the council and take notes ye kin do it; but how to git out of this is another thing."

"Never mind," said Mark cheerfully. "The *Tabard* luck has brought us safe here, and I'll trust it to take us safe out. I want you and Bill to listen close, and translate to me."

"All right, Mr. Meagur," said Charley in a tone of resignation. "'Taint no use, but we mout as well do it. The papers may git the notes arter we're wiped out."

"Charley," said the "special" approvingly, "if you'd been brought up to it, you'd have made a good journalist. That's the true spirit."

Colorado Charley made a wry face.

"I'd rayther be excused, Mister Meagur. Ef all you newspaper gentlemen is like you, I'd rayther not be one. It's reg'lar foolishness, this biz."

Mark smiled, but said no more, for at that moment the Indians began to crowd thicker round the council-fire, and the circle was nearly completed.

"Come here, and be ready to interpret," said the "special" shortly after; and as he spoke he took out his note-book. The guides quietly obeyed; and then the three

men stood at the door of the medicine-teepee, watching the proceedings at the council-fire not fifty feet distant.

It was a strange scene, and one full of interest and excitement to the cultivated mind of the journalist, who had a keen sense for the picturesque and romantic, and the trained powers of expression of an old reporter. He scribbled away in his note-book before a word was spoken, transcribing the principal features of the scene before him. There was the great council-fire, and the circle of grave, silent Indians squatted round it, most of them smoking. Behind them one might see the white lodges, standing out like ghosts in the darkness, against a dense low black bank of cloud with livid reflections, that had been slowly rising in the north-west all the afternoon. Every now and then the low, faint mutterings of distant thunder were audible, and gleams of light played at the rounded, velvety edges of this gloomy mass. The Indians, in consequence of the suffocating heat, dropped their blankets around their legs as they seated themselves in the circle, and sat naked to the waist, while the crowds behind them had stripped to their waist-cloths.

While Mark Meagher watched the gathering council a low chorus of guttural grunts came from the Indians, as a chief of unusual height entered the circle, with his arm linked in that of Frank Armstrong. Then, indeed, Mark uttered a cry of surprise himself, for he had felt convinced that the young officer had been killed by the squaws. Armstrong had dropped his black clothes, and was attired in a suit of buckskin similar to that of the chief beside him. Both were ornamented with gold lace and buttons, in a way very unusual among Indians.

The tall chief advanced to the centre of the circle with haughty dignity, and then turned and began to speak, with his hand on the shoulder of Armstrong. As he spoke, the *two guides* within the teepee translated in a low tone; and

Mark's pencil kept at work, flying over the paper like a race-horse. His dearest wish was realized. He was reporting an Indian council verbatim.

"Men of the Cut Throat nation," said the tall chief; "I have come as I promised. You are here as you promised. There are no lies in our hearts or tongues. I have lived with the white men, and know their wisdom as well as their lies. You see this man. He was my friend among the white men. He told no lies to me. He is my brother. He has come here to see me, and to speak to you words from the Big Yellow Chief. He has taken his life in his hand to speak to you. Will you hear him?"

Then Mac Diarmid took Armstrong by the hand, and conducted him to a seat opposite a gray old chief, where they both sat down. The wily half-breed extended his hand to the old chief, and took the pipe from his grasp with a sudden, rapid motion, before the other could refuse, when he placed it to Armstrong's lips.

Mark, who had watched the proceeding with a great deal of interest, saw that the glowing eyes of every Indian in the circle were fixed on the pair of new comers with a menacing expression; but not a man moved. Then, as the pipe of the old chief was handed back to him by Armstrong, with a low bow, the red faces became stolid once more, and fully three minutes elapsed before any one spoke, while the smoke of the pipes and fire became a bluish cloud in the still, sultry evening air.

Presently a tall, powerful chief, big-boned and iron-featured, with a grave face that looked as if it were moulded in cast iron, rose, advanced to the fire, and began to speak.

"The Gold Chief is our friend, and the blood of a red tribe runs in his veins. He is safe within our camp; but his friend is one of the cursed Americans that have hunted us to death. His friend must die. He has come to our village without asking leave, and he must die."

Grunts of approval round the circle testified that the sentiments of the speaker were relished.

Mac Diarmid said nothing as the speaker sat down. The next to get up was Standing Bear, head chief of the assemblage of various bands that constituted the village.

Standing Bear was heavily built, and had the massive, leonine face so common among old Indian chiefs.

"The white men that come from the Great Father are all liars," he said. "This man comes from the Big Yellow Chief. He is a warrior, therefore. Why did he come into camp with a black father? He is a liar, like the rest. Let him die."

One after another of the chiefs rose and spoke to the same purpose. They were unanimous that the stranger should die. Yet no one offered to touch him, as long as he sat by Mac Diarmid, with the arm of the tall chief round his neck.

Then Mac Diarmid arose, still retaining his hold on Frank, and again advanced to the centre of the circle. As he did so, Mark Meagher noticed a short, square-built man, with a huge red beard, who stood, with his arms folded, behind the place that Mac Diarmid had lately occupied. Beside this man stood another, a priest; and the "special" started, as he recognized the reason of the failure of his own crafty scheme to secure safety.

"The men of the Cut Throat have said that the white men are all liars, but they have forgotten the Black Father," said Mac Diarmid. "They have forgotten the Red Bull, who has been a friend and a trader among the warriors for many years. Why should they not give me my friend? All he asks is permission to speak."

Then he drew back with Armstrong, and paused till some Indian should answer him.

A great stout fellow slowly rose and stalked forward, *slapping his* naked breast.

"Look at me," he said. "I am Tatonka, the Bull. I was a friend to the white man. I lived on the reservation with my children. I gave up the war path, and hunted no more. The white men told us that we should be rich and fat. They would give us flour and coffee and sugar in barrels, wagons and big horses and cows, if we would give them our land. Some of us said, 'No: they have lied to us before; they will lie again. Let us keep our land.' Then they said to us: 'Come again to-morrow and speak. We will give you the flour and things, that you may know we do not lie.' And we went. And then they had soldiers round about us, and men said: 'You *must* sell, whether you like it or not'; and we saw that we were trapped. So we went on the reservation. Well, they fed us for a month, and then the flour ran short, and the head man told us to wait; and we waited, and no flour came; and my children were starving; and I left the place to hunt, and lived by one of the forts where the soldiers are. And the soldiers threw us bones as if we were dogs, till my heart was dead within me, but I staid on, for they would give me whiskey to hunt for them. And one day a young chief of the soldiers tried to ride over me, and lashed me with his whip like a dog; and then my heart rose up again, and I said, 'I will be a white man's friend no longer. I will go to my own people. The white man's embrace strangles the Indian; but in war the white man is a coward. It is better to go to war with him.' And I took my women and children at night, and we stole two horses from the soldiers to flee. But I went back to find the chief who had beaten me, and I shot him in front of his own teepee. That is the way to deal with white men —kill them. I have said."

Tatonka's speech, delivered in a high, monotonous key, with much excitement and gesticulation, excited a chorus of approving *grunts*. When he had retired there was another *silence*, broken by Standing Bear.

"It is enough. We will not hear the young white chief. He is a brave man to come to us, but he can bring nothing but lies. The Big Yellow Chief is a great warrior, but he comes from the liars, and we will hear nothing. If he comes to fight, we will fight, but we will not talk with him. If this young man wishes to join his friends, he can do so, and die like a wolf in a trap. If not, let him show us that he is a brave man, and die at the fire like a brave warrior, who mocks his enemies."

During the whole of this discussion, so interesting to Armstrong could he have understood it, not a look nor gesture, save those of Tatonka, could have given him a clue to the meaning of the speakers.

He turned now to Mac Diarmid.

"What are they saying, Mac?"

"They are unanimous in the opinion that you must die," said the half-breed gravely. "They offer you the choice between being starved to death in the medicine-teepee with your friends, or burned alive like a warrior."

"Will they let me speak?"

"Not a word. They are too much incensed against your nation to listen. I advise you to go to the teepee. While there is life there is hope. You are not safe, the moment I take my hand from you, except in there. I have done my best for you. If you knew what these men are saying, you would not wonder at their hatred. Will you go?"

The young officer bowed his head in silence, and amid a perfect stillness he walked slowly across the circle, accompanied by Mac Diarmid, till both stood by the great teepee.

Then they clasped hands, and Mac Diarmid spoke:

"Good-by, Armstrong. I've done all I could now, but *you had* ventured too far. Henceforth, remember, I am *an Indian first*, and a friend to you afterward. If I can

save your life, and do these people no harm, good: if not, and it is a question between you and them, remember, they are first and you second."

He turned proudly away and stalked back to the circle, where he at once began to speak.

"Men of the Cut Throats, you are right. A warrior loves his friend, and I have done what I could for mine; but you are first and he comes after. I come from the land of the Blackfeet, whose trail is in the dark, and whose warriors have laughed at the white soldiers since they first met them. They have taken their women and children, and they have moved to the lands of the White Mother, where there are no bad soldiers to hunt them, no settlers to steal their lands. They send me to their brothers of the great nation of the Dakota, to say, 'Come into our land and join with us. Then will we join with the soldiers of the White Mother when war comes, and we will take the scalps of the soldiers of the Great Father of Liars, till we have driven them from the land, which we shall inherit for our children, while the buffalo shall roam again and multiply like the grass.' Men of the Cut Throat, what think you of this? Will you heed the words of the Blackfoot, and flee to the land of the White Mother?"

When Mac Diarmid sat down there was a dead blank of silence, amidst which men looked at each other as if surprised. At last Standing Bear arose.

"The Gold Chief has spoken well. I was born in the land of the White Mother, and we know that they are not liars there. There is one law for the white man and the red. It is good to be there. When we are driven from *here*, we will go *there*. Now, we are happy *here*. We have buffalo meat in plenty, and the white soldiers cannot move us. Why should we go to the land of the White Mother? It is very cold there in the winter, and our horses would starve. We will stay where we are."

The grunts of approval indicated that the speaker had touched the popular heart, till Mac Diarmid rose again and said:

"The Standing Bear is a wise man, but not so wise as he who comes from the land of the White Mother. Before the leaves turn red, the Big Yellow Chief will be here, and his men with him. What will you do then?"

Within the medicine-teepee, where Armstrong was now standing, listening with intense interest to the translation of the speeches, as they were muttered in low tones by the scout Fardeau, the young officer started and muttered:

"Traitor! I told him that in confidence, as a comrade."

Then he listened more intently than ever.

"The man whom you would not hear told me from whence he came," pursued the half-breed. "He says that the Big Yellow Chief is to come from one direction, while an old white-head chief moves up from the south, and that both of them are to be here within the summer. If you will be guided by me, you can beat them both; but more will come, and then at last you will have to go to the land of the White Mother, or die in the river here, or go to a reservation, to work like squaws and starve like wolves in winter."

This time the sentiment of the meeting was clearly in favor of Mac Diarmid, for Hole-in-the-Face jumped up and said:

"The Gold Chief can do anything. Will he lead us against our enemies if they come?"

A proud smile illuminated the features of the young half-breed.

"Harken!" he cried, speaking for the first time with action and energy. "Look at me. I am a man that has been among the whites, and learned all they have to teach. I can manage the great guns that shoot twice, and show

you how to use them.* I can make you beat your enemies wherever you see them, if you will follow me. With the White Mother for a friend, we can beat the Father of Liars and drive him from our hunting grounds. All you must do, is to promise to obey my words."

This fired the Indians greatly, for it offered them a distinct promise.

"Let us move our camp to the land of the White Mother at once," pursued the chief, "where our women and children shall be in safety, while the warriors are ready to go on the war-path. When that is done, we can unite all the tribes that are under the White Mother with the men of the Cut Throat Nation, and come down on the thieving settlers like the locusts that eat up their crops in summer."

Here again he had the sympathies of his hearers with him, and was greeted with a chorus of grunts of approval.

Then he sat down amid a dead silence, and young Armstrong turned to Meagher.

"What an infernal villain he is! Why, who would believe that he had once enjoyed the bounty of the nation, and received his education at the same Academy from which I graduated?"

Mark, who was still watching the council, said in a low tone, "Yes, it's hard to change an Indian from his purpose."

"Hard!" echoed Armstrong, sharply. "It's perfectly impossible! I thought that man and I were the dearest friends, and here he is—the ungrateful villain!—willing to fight against the best government the world ever saw, and to bring murder and rapine upon the industrious farmers of the north-west. Why, it's monstrous! The frontiersmen are right: there's no possible future for the Indian but extermination, along with the wolf and the bison."

* The Indians have a great dread of howitzers, which they call the "guns that shoot *twice*," *alluding to* the exploding shells.

Mark smiled very slightly.

"At present the parties to be exterminated don't seem to be of the right color, Armstrong," he answered. "Here *we* are, for example, closely guarded in this teepee; and I see no possible chance of getting out at the present moment or any other. There's not a scrap of food, and—— Holloa! Look out, Fardeau. They're beginning again."

A slender, wiry Indian, with a body covered with scars, rose to speak. He was noted for his desperate bravery and the skill he showed in hiding his trail. He was called Black Moon by the Indians.

"The Gold Chief speaks words of wisdom," said Black Moon. "We are few and feeble, but our children are many. In the land of the White Mother they will be safe. Let us send them there, and go to meet the Big Yellow Chief. I have taken many white scalps, but I want more. I hate them all. I have spoken."

"Hach! Hach!" grunted the circle, and a boy in the rear uttered a shrill yell, while the women began to sing a long, wailing chant, rising and falling. Now, for the first time, the Indians began to show symptoms of excitement, for their eyes flashed, and they began to sway their bodies to and fro, in time to the chant. Then into the circle leaped a young warrior, who brandished a knife in his hand.

"Look at me!" he shouted, stamping around. "I am Black Wolf, that killed the white chief at the spring when he was drinking, like a fool that had no eyes or ears. I crept on him from behind and stabbed him with this, and I took his scalp. Black Wolf is a warrior, and wants to go on the war-path!"

The excitement increased as he began to yell, and a second warrior jumped up to yell and stamp in rivalry with *Black* Wolf.

"*I* am American Horse!" he yelled. "[illegible]

horse that the white soldiers had, and we took the scalps of all but one. He was a big warrior, with a bull's mane on his chin, and he got into the fort alive. Hayeece!!! Where is the warrior like me?"

"By Gosh!" said Colorado Charley. "I know that buck, Mister Meagur. He stole 'em, as he says, from a scoutin' party under a green young loo-*ten*ant, as mout be Mister Armstrong thar, and I war the only man in the party as saved his scalp. Look at 'em now. The bucks is all crazy. No more council. That's war."

In fact, the council very soon after broke up in disorder, as the warriors began to dance about and "count their coups," describing the different victories in which they had been engaged, with shrill yells and much braggadocia.

Mark saw Mac Diarmid, Father de Launay and Evan Roy retire, as soon as this began, and Armstrong asked whether there might not be danger of the Indians working themselves up to an attack on the sanctuary.

Hardly had he spoken, when an arrow whistled into the open door of the medicine-teepee, passing just over their heads. Instinctively the young officer started to one side, but Colorado Charley, instead of seeming alarmed, went up to the arrow, which was caught in the hides on the other wall of the teepee, and took it to the fire.

"You needn't be skeert, Loo-*ten*ant," he said, coolly. "That arrer came from a friend, who's takin' a sorter advantage of this here scrimmage. Look!"

He held it out, and Armstrong examined the shaft more closely. The faint light from the council-fire without gleamed over a blood-red missile, shaft and feather.

"Red Arrow!" exclaimed he, in a tone of delight. "My faithful Pawnee has found us!"

"Then, by Gosh, he'd better not let *them* find *him*," said Charley, with a grim chuckle. "Ef thar's a thing a

Sioux hates, it's a Pawnee; and ef a Pawnee kin get the drop on a Sioux, he's gwine to do it. I'd jest admire to know how that cuss has got inter this camp, without bein' found out."

As he spoke, the dancers outside began to leave the fire and circle around the medicine-teepee, yelling out threats to the prisoners, when a fantastic figure, covered with the tails of small animals and the skins of opossums and tiger-cats, came bounding among them, beating a sort of tamborine and yelling:

"I am Yellow Liver, the Wizard, who can call the Bad God to bring death on all the Cut Throats. Strangers are in the medicine-teepee, and they must be killed, for Yellow Liver must go in to curse them. HAYEEEEE!!!! Scatter all! The Bad God is coming, and Yellow Liver will curse the strangers."

Then, with a tremendous yelling and gesticulation, this nightmare-looking figure dashed round the circle of guards, belaboring some with his tamborine, others with a stick, to which was tied a bladder containing some small stones, which rattled loudly. The Indians in the circle fell back before the antics of the conjuror, who roared like a bull and yelled like a maniac, as he danced.

"Leave me to curse the strangers till sunrise, and lo! in the morning they shall come out to be tortured," he cried, as the Indians fell back. Then the conjurer dashed whooping into the tent, and pulled down the flap over the door, till the lodge was in total darkness, save for the glimmer of the dying medicine-fire.

"Don't touch the varmint," cried Colorado Charley, hastily. "Ef ye kill *him*, they'll hev *us, sure.*"

The conjurer became silent the moment the door was shut, and then produced a civilized match, which he struck *in* scientific fashion.

"*Me* tole you so, Lootner," said the familiar voice of

Red Arrow. "Sioux all same heap dam fool. Me kill medicine-man and take his close. May be so, we get out, bimeby, two, tree, forty-'leven minute. Hach!"

As he spoke, a bright blue glare lit up the teepee, revealing his features as if in broad daylight, followed by a tremendous peal of thunder which crashed through the ensuing darkness with a singularly weird effect. Then all was still as death: even the Indians outside had ceased their yells, and were waiting in superstitious awe for the results of the incantation of their fancied medicine-chief.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BIVOUAC.

CAPTAIN GROUTEY sat by his little fire smoking moodily, while Van Dyck was stretched on a buffalo robe close by, looking up at his company commander. Both seemed cross and ill-tempered, though both had been drinking enough to make them good-natured. In the regiment to which they belonged there had always been two distinct sets of officers, the drinking men, who swore by Groutey, and the ambitious men, who stuck to St. Aure and believed him a sort of demigod. Besides Groutey and Van Dyck, there was young Otard, a recent acquisition from civil life, who had learned to elaborate his profanity and outswear any man in the Twelfth in six months' service at Fort Napoleon, under the able guidance of his chosen mentors. Captain Burke, who had always been a hard drinker, was the only man in the regiment of the same morals who did not stick to Groutey when sober; and the erratic Irishman vibrated from one party to the other with the condition of his intellect and the state of the bottle. To-night he was in that doubtful state technically called "three sheets in the wind," and sat on a camp chair blinking solemnly at the fire within a few feet of Groutey, while Otard was standing on the other side, balancing unsteadily on his heels and smoking a black meerschaum pipe. His young face was thin and haggard from prolonged dissipation, and looked ghastly pale in the firelight.

"I'm not going to curry favor with him to please any *one,*" *growled* Groutey, as he puffed at his pipe. "I don't

hesitate to say that I prefer General Slaughter to General St. Aure any day, and if there are some of his superserviceable spies around, they are welcome to tell him. I've written what I think of him over my own name, and he never noticed it."

"Ahem! How—hic—was that, Groutey?" asked Otard with owlish gravity.

Groutey cast a rapid glance at the other. The Captain was never known to be so drunk that he staggered or felt in any way confused. He only grew dogged and insulting in his cups.

"Oh, what's the good of telling a boy like you?" he sneered. "You can't carry your whiskey like a man, Otard; and the first thing you know, our Philistine chief will be clapping you in arrest."

Otard stalked over to where Groutey was sitting.

"I'd have you know, Captain——" he began angrily.

Then Groutey jumped up in a moment, cast a single apprehensive glance toward the fire at headquarters, and forced Otard into his own chair.

"Sit down, you cursed idiot," he hissed in a fierce whisper. "Do you want me to be reprimanded again for your sake, as I was for Van Dyck's this morning?"

Otard's face became sulky, but he said nothing, for every one in camp was rather afraid of Groutey, who was known to be particularly ugly in his temper.

Van Dyck turned round on his elbow.

"I wish to the Lord we were under old Slaughter once more!" he growled. "He never interfered with the little amusements of a gentleman, so long as they didn't clearly interfere with his duty, and even then a reprimand was the worst thing an officer got."

They were interrupted by the approach of the first sergeant of the company, who came up and saluted, looking at Groutey.

"May I speak with you, sir, a moment?"

"Certainly, sergeant," said Groutey, good-naturedly enough, for he was always easy in manner with his men.

"There's Pat Cross, sir. He was detailed on the wagon guard to-day, and he got a canteen full of whiskey; and before I could find what was the matter, he and Dennis Doolan were blind drunk, sir."

"Buck and gag the infernal scoundrels!" said the old captain, savagely. "I'll teach the good-for-nothing ruffians to get drunk around *me*. Buck and gag them, sergeant, and leave 'em till morning to get sober. What are you waiting for?"

"Please, sir," said the sergeant, hesitatingly, "there's a standing order, sir——"

"Curse the standing—— No, I don't mean that," said the old captain, sullenly. "Well, tie 'em up to-night if they're noisy, and make 'em walk to-morrow."

"Very good, sir": and the sergeant walked off.

"There's another of his infernal Philistine rules and regulations," growled Groutey, shaking his fist at headquarters, but speaking low. "An officer old enough to be his father, by Heavens! and can't be trusted to discipline his own company as he pleases! I believe in buck and gag. Never knew anything like it to take down a drunken fellow when he gets ugly."

Captain Burke here made an uneasy motion, and looked up fretfully.

"How would ye like it yerself, Bob, ivery time ye get —well, a little onsteady? It's mesilf that don't approve of bucking and gagging for anything but nagurs."

Groutey grinned. His sense of humor was touched.

"I forgot, Matthew, that you were in the ranks before the war. Maybe you've been there, yourself."

"And what if I have?" demanded Burke fretfully. "*I'll thank* ye to be keeping yer reflections to yersilf, Cap-

tain Groutey; for it's meself that don't appreciate the witty remarks ye're makin'."

Groutey frowned, and was about to growl out some angry retort—for he was just enough in liquor to be quarrelsome—when they heard the bugle blowing "officers' call," summoning them to headquarters. He started and recollected himself; then, with solemn steps and trying hard to walk steady, the four officers obeyed the call.

General St. Aure, a two weeks' beard on his face, his buckskin tunic covered at the neck by the broad collar of a blue shirt, lay on a buffalo robe inside of his tent, watching the fire before the door in a thoughtful manner. His broad white hat was pushed back as usual from his forehead, and there was nothing in his appearance to indicate the officer, his rifle and pistols being those of a common frontiersman. In front of the tent, near the fire, with a huge staghound looking up in his face courting notice, stood Adjutant Peyton, in the same sort of rough and ready dress as the General, very different from the trim neatness of his appearance when at Marengo. Jim St. Aure was thoughtfully smoking as he sat on a log a little way from Peyton, and stroking the ears of the General's rough greyhound, Zietero.

As the bugler, who had been summoned by Peyton at the command of the chief, moved back to his quarters after sounding the call, General St. Aure looked up to see the officers coming. Beyond the fire, nothing was visible but starlight and a bare, desolate, sandy plain, the white tents scattered around, with the dark mass of horses at the picket line beyond, and the canvas tilts of the wagons corralled close by.

Presently steps approached, and young Darcy came up, saluted, and halted in front of the fire, the first officer on the line. St. Aure's face brightened, for he liked the young fellow. Then officer after officer came up and stood

in a line, St. Aure watching them keenly from where he lay on the robe, till old Groutey and his cronies had joined the concourse and stood staring at the fire. Then Jim St. Aure got up and took his place, while Peyton saluted his chief, saying:

"All here, Colonel."

After this he took his own post in the centre of the line, while the two dogs walked gravely about, waving their tails and snuffing at the visitors. Then St. Aure slowly rose, came out, and confronted his officers. For a few moments there was a dead silence, every one saluting and looking at his commander, who returned the compliment without speaking. Old Groutey's face began to twist into its usual look of grim ill humor, till St. Aure spoke, when he became serious, not to say stolid, but attentive.

"Gentlemen," said St. Aure in his clear, sharp tones, "I have sent for you to-night to give you some news. We are about to cut loose from our wagons, which we shall leave with the infantry guard, and move on a fresh trail, brought in by our Pawnee scout, The Dog. I have reason to believe that the Indians are not far off, and in heavy force, in the valley of the Yellowstone. Remember this, that in starting alone we have no half-way measures to take. Either we beat the Indians badly, or get beaten badly. It will take hard riding to find them, and I shall depend on the younger officers of this command to ride hard. We are going on a scout full of danger, but which I hope to make successful as well as pleasant to all concerned. Any alleviations to the hardships which are inevitable you may depend on me to give you, but I wish one thing distinctly understood: I am going to catch the Indians if there is any catch to them, and every officer who goes on this expedition must do his best to help me. I further want it understood that while this regiment is *under my* command I expect every order to be obeyed at

once, and without criticism or question, not only my own orders, but those of every officer to his inferior. I don't want it said of this regiment, as was said by the commander of a neighboring department about another, that 'it would be good if he could only get rid of the old captains, and let the young lieutenants command the companies.' To-morrow morning we shall leave the wagons, and only one pack-mule will be allowed to each company, besides the ammunition mules. Each man will have a hundred rounds for the carbine and four dozen for pistol. 'Boot and saddle' will blow at four o'clock, and we expect to reach the divide at sunset, so as to cross in the night. That's all, gentlemen."

Out of the darkness came the harsh voice of old Groutey.

"May I ask, Colonel, to whom you referred when you spoke as you did of old captains?"

"I meant the saddle for the place where it would fit best," said St. Aure, clearly and distinctly.

"Have you ever heard of my criticising or grumbling at any orders of yours?" asked the veteran, in the same tone of injury.

"I don't know that I have, sir," said St. Aure, in the sharp manner in which he had first spoken. "I don't anticipate it in the future either, for I trust that all the officers of this regiment know their duty. Gentlemen, I wish you good evening."

The commanding officer turned and went back into the tent, without another word, while the officers broke up into groups and sauntered off.

"Like his cursed Philistine ways," growled the old captain as he walked back to his fire. "He'll find I go as far to obey orders as any of his clique when the time comes, but he won't say it. No, he'll shut everybody up, as if, by Heavens, he was an emperor and we slaves!"

For all this, however, the old captain spent most of the night in preparations for the march; and when the bugle blew in the morning, no neater nor better equipped body of men could be found in the Twelfth Cavalry than the company of this hoary grumbler.

It was an hour before sunrise when the compact column left the camp and took up a new lodge-pole trail leading to the Yellowstone River, and by sunset, as St. Aure had predicted, they reached the top of the divide, where, three weeks before, Armstrong had parted from Van Dyck.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TORNADO.

WHEN the Pawnee scout had discovered himself to the party within the medicine-lodge, he resumed the same wild vociferation that had so astonished them when they first heard it. Even while doing so, however, he handed his tamborine to Colorado Charley and his rattle to Fardeau, who took the hint and made all the noise they could with the implements. Then he shook himself, still yelling, and threw down, from under his mantle of skins, a great sack.

"You howl," he ejaculated to Colorado Charley. "Make big heap noise—dam big noise."

The plainsman was not slow to catch the hint, and yelled all sorts of Sioux epithets as he beat the tamborine; while Red Arrow, covered by the noise, drew out a little stick which he lighted in the fire, and hurriedly showed them the contents of the sack.

"Much heap beef. All Yellow Liver got," he explained. "Much rain come on to-night. You catch water in bag. Red Arrow take Lootner. Go for Gin'ral. Get back, mebbe two, tree, forty-'leven day. All right."

"How do you know it's going to rain?" asked the young officer. Red Arrow laughed.

"Hark!" he said. "Wind coming now. Get off in storm mebbe."

Sure enough, they heard the wind beginning to moan through the valley, and presently the dust blew whirling into the teepee with a violence that told that the storm had

come. Colorado Charley continued his howls with greater violence, and Red Arrow, peeping through the door of the lodge, saw the great black cloud, that had been rising all the evening, now sweeping up the valley with all the marks of a heavy storm. The practised eye of the Pawnee took in the whole situation in a minute, and he came back.

"Stop howl," he said to Charley.

The scout obeyed, and there was a dead silence in the teepee. Then they heard a scuffling of feet outside, as the Indians scattered to their lodges before the coming storm.

"Listen," said the Pawnee, quickly. "Big storm come—blow up lodge, blow up medicine-teepee, blow 'way Injin. Be ready run. No chance else."

It required no great penetration to see the force of the Indian's reasoning. The moaning of the wind had increased to a roaring sound that one of the party at least recognized.

"It's a tornado," said Mark Meagher, in a tone of apprehension. "I've heard that sound before. It'll blow the teepee all to pieces, and where is our sanctuary then?"

"Must run—run to ribber—jump in," said the Pawnee, in the same tone. "Strip close—quick!"

As he spoke, he set the example by dropping his own clothes to the ground, a pattern the others were not slow to follow, the guides retaining their belts and weapons. Meantime the wind was rising to a roar around them, and the heavy structure of the teepee began to rock and bend beneath the blasts, while the darkness became intense. The dust filled the air, and the door blew open; while, outside, the council-fire had been scattered into sparks and vanished, and not an Indian was to be seen for the pitchy darkness.

On a sudden came a torrent of rain and the sound of a rushing of waters, a deafening clap of thunder following on a blinding flash, and then the great medicine-teepee blew up and flew to pieces, while the tornado seized the

party within and whirled them away like so many straws. The last thing Armstrong remembered was feeling himself clutched on each side by some one, he could not tell whom in the darkness; and then they were all hurried away, he knew not whither. Of only one thing he felt conscious, that there were three of them in the party, and that their united weight served to steady them in some slight degree as they were driven along, for they did not seem to be lifted in the air, so much as borne over the surface of the ground. He felt mud and sharp hailstones cutting his face and half-naked body, for he wore nothing but a pair of buckskin trousers, having thrown away his shirt before the teepee fell. Now came a cold blast, anon a breath as hot as if from the mouth of a furnace. Then there was a lull, and he found himself standing in the midst of a dark, warm mist, while the roaring receded.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"All right," said the voice of Mark Meagher on one side; but the words were hardly out when the cold blast struck them again, and drove the sharp, stinging mud into their skins, carrying them away, incapable of resistance, and dashing them from side to side. The second blast, however, proved shorter than the first, and presently left them once more, this time in the middle of a cold wind and mist, under which they shivered and shook, while the intense darkness prevented them from telling where they were.

"Down, Lootner," said the voice of Red Arrow, at this juncture; and the three threw themselves flat on the ground, grasping at the roots of grass, just as a third blast came on.

This time they managed to remain where they were, while the tornado howled over them, and when the third blast had spent its force, Red Arrow rose up, saying:

"Now, Lootner, we *git*—much heap dam quick. Sioux after us, when storm pass."

It needed no second invitation to inspirit the two white men, who started at once, hand in hand with the Indian. Red Arrow struck out without any hesitation, though it was still pitch dark, and they advanced in the midst of a pelting rain, through deep, matted grass, blown flat by the wind. The white men soon realized the nature of the Pawnee's guide, when they felt that he was facing the cold wind steadily; and so they went on till they suddenly heard loud cries and the trampling of hoofs coming down on them from the right.

"Run, Lootner! Stampede!" grunted the Pawnee, as he caught Armstrong's hand and ran straight forward. Presently, in the dense gloom, something rushed by them; and then, without a word of warning, all three pitched headlong over a bank into the water, while the splashing of hundreds of animals after them told how nearly they had escaped instant annihilation.

Instinctively Armstrong struck out, letting go his companions' hands, and found himself swimming for his life in the midst of the foaming rapids of the Yellowstone. Oh, how cold it was! and yet he felt safer. He had escaped from the Indian camp, and was still alive and free: so much was certain. Of the future he still hoped with the ardor of a young man, as he struck bravely out, going down stream like a cork.

A very short time of such swimming carried him down a long way with little fatigue; and as the black cloud of the tornado cleared slowly away, going up the valley, he began to see where he was, in the midst of a number of animals, swimming, that he soon perceived to be horses. With the instinct of a man whose wits are sharpened by extreme peril, he realized that he must be among the *Indian herd*, stampeded by the tornado, and probably, also,

in the midst of the Indians themselves, intent on catching their stock.

As he thought of this he reflected also that he was naked and unarmed in a fight for life, and it occurred to him that the sooner he secured a horse the better off he would be in case of being found by the savages. Swimming as he was in the midst of the herd, that had jumped into the river along with himself and companions, it was natural that all should drift down together; and he quickly reasoned that they must all be ahead of the Indians sent in pursuit of the herd. While he was cogitating all this, and swimming closer to the nearest horse in order to grasp the creature by the mane, he saw the white face of Mark Meagher beside him, and hurriedly communicated his plan. The "special" had his black cap on, and it was tied under his chin with a white handkerchief, which made him quite conspicuous in the river. He nodded silently, and a moment later, by watching their chances, each was beside an Indian pony, with long streaming mane, which they could seize, so as to be carried along without difficulty.

But where was the Pawnee? He had disappeared entirely. No! There was an Indian close by.

"There he is, Meagher," whispered Armstrong. "Isn't that he?"

"Either Red Arrow or one of our friends behind," the correspondent replied in the same tone. "If it's a Sioux we've got to wipe him out or be wiped out ourselves, that's certain."

They swept along in the current with the horses, and still the Indian did not seem to recognize them, though he turned his head several times.

"It's a Sioux," said Meagher at last. "He's fooling us. Have you a knife?"

"Nothing but my bare hands," said Armstrong.

"We're two to one, and stout fellows. Let's drown him."

"Agreed," said the "special" grimly; and they drifted down on the Indian, getting ready for the struggle by guiding their horses so as to take him on each side. This was by no means difficult, for the wild creatures shied away, as it was, from the sight of the white bodies of their riders, if they leaned to either side. But before they had come to the Sioux another person made his appearance, in the shape of the Pawnee scout, who suddenly sprang out from behind the horse under whose neck he had been hiding, and came up beside the Sioux.

"Hach!" grunted the savage with a start as he turned; but it was too late. The knife of Red Arrow was in his back before he could draw his own, and the Pawnee stabbed again and again at his hated foe in grim silence. Then they saw him hold down the head of the lifeless body and tear something off, and they knew that another Sioux scalp was at the girdle of Red Arrow.

He turned round from where he was sitting on the horse of the slain Sioux and beckoned them up. Then they found that he had a rein on the animal already.

"All right, Lootner," he said in a tone of perfect coolness. "Mebbe we get off dis time—Sioux big fool. We got best horse here—head of herd. Must go shore—tire um out here—no good—come. Here, Lootner, take dam fool's knife and belt—here lariat—make um rein—stick um in jaw—dat so."

As he spoke he handed Armstrong the knife of the defunct Sioux, along with a piece of the trailing lariat which had been attached to the collar of the animal the unfortunate Indian had ridden in pursuit of the herd.

"He's got a war pony," said Mark. "Make a half hitch round your brute's jaw, Armstrong. Get on his *back, man.* We'll have to ride Indian fashion. Give me

a piece of that lariat, Red Arrow. This is fun, by Jove; and the *Tabard* will get those notes yet."

It was a strange, wild scene in the turbid, swiftly-flowing river, to see these three friends, so strangely brought together and circumstanced, met in the naked equality of man to man, with woodcraft for the only mark of superiority. Armstrong had not taken his falls on the tan bark of the riding-school at West Point without learning how to straddle a horse bare-backed; and in the water no horse can fight against a naked man who knows his business, especially if the horse has been bitted before.

Inside of ten minutes thereafter Red Arrow and the two white men, driving with them and followed by some dozen of the best out of the herd of ponies, turned to shore, landed on a little spit of sand, and galloped up the bank.

As they did so, all crouched low in the middle of the herd, Red Arrow entirely disappearing, while the two white men, more clumsy, only succeeded in partially hiding themselves. However, they were soon into the woods, and the night was still dark; so that they might well hope to evade pursuit till the morning.

Once fairly in the forest, Red Arrow took the lead, and struck off for the deserts in the direction of the Little Missouri, as it chanced, on the very same night that General St. Anre left his wagons and started on his scout.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WOMAN'S PART.

MRS. ST. AURE sat in the commandant's parlor at Marengo, quietly knitting, while Nettie Dashwood, pale and thin, her once luxuriant blonde hair cut short and clustering round her head in little curls like those of a boy, lay back by the window in a rocking chair. It was no longer summer, but late in October. The air outside was nipping and frosty, the sky gray and gloomy, and all the windows were closed, while a great wood fire burned in the fire-place, late in the afternoon.

But that was not the only change at Marengo. In the open square of the parade-ground, once so gay with figures on the smooth-shaven lawn, the coarse autumn grasses were now standing as they had wilted, brown, wiry and neglected. The paths, formerly so trim and neat, were dotted with tufts of weeds, and the plank walks looked dirty and neglected. The barracks were blank and deserted in appearance, save for a single door at one end of the long row, which stood half open, and through which passed at long intervals a single figure in shirt-sleeves, carrying a pail and broom. The only sentries in sight were one down by the guard-house and another in front of the quartermaster's building, so that Fort Marengo presented a truly forlorn and desolate appearance.

Poor Nettie lay back in her rocking-chair by the window to survey this inspiriting scene, and as she heard the wind moaning in low, mournful notes around the house, *the poor* child felt inexpressibly gloomy. She was still

very weak and thin, having been convalescent for only a few days; and so it happened that when Mrs. St. Aure, who had been working steadily and in silence, heaved a deep sigh, which showed where her thoughts had been, it was echoed by something very like a sob from Nettie. Then Mrs. St. Aure looked quickly up, and found that her little patient was weeping in a dreary, hopeless kind of manner, and the sweet lady looked much troubled, the more so that the tears had been in her own eyes already, before she had looked at Nettie.

The commandant's wife was used to comforting others at all times; but somehow on this occasion she felt almost unequal to the task. Nevertheless she rose from her seat, and advanced to Nettie with an air of maternal authority, saying:

"Now, my dear, this will not do. You must not—cry—it's—very—foolish and—wrong."

And then, in the most inconsequential manner, Mrs. St. Aure began to cry herself, and rock Nettie in her arms.

"Oh, Mrs. St. Aure, it's so desolate, waiting," moaned poor Nettie. "If I could only know something for certain! I cannot believe he is dead; but, oh, it's so long to wait, and hear nothing!"

Mrs. St. Aure, having indulged herself with that mysterious consolation dear to the feminine heart under the name of "a good cry," resumed her most responsible air.

"My dear," she said, "I shall be ashamed of my patient presently, if you do not behave better. It cannot be many days now before we hear some news. The expeditions which start so late in the season are always late coming back, but they *must* return before the snows set in."

"And you really think I am not quite a fool to hope?" said Nettie in a wistful tone, looking pleadingly up in her friend's face.

Mrs. St. Aure stroked the short curls with an affectionate gesture, but she gave a little sigh.

"While there is life there is hope," said the commandant's lady, evasively. "We have heard no certain news of anything but Mr. Armstrong's departure on a very hazardous quest; and you must remember that the General once did a very similar thing, venturing into the midst of hostile Indian tribes, and succeeding in bringing them back to their allegiance to the government. My dear, I don't quite know what to say to you. Don't hope too much, for the awakening from delusion may be very bitter."

Nettie looked up with her wide open eyes into Mrs. St. Aure's face, and shivered slightly. Then, with a sudden revulsion of feeling, she burst out:

"Oh, how selfish I am! And all this time you are grieving over the absence of your own noble husband, while I weary you with my complaints! Please forgive me: I'll try to be good. What a trouble I must be to you and Aunt Isabel!"

Mrs. St. Aure smiled kindly, and then sighed.

"My child, you can hardly imagine how much more miserable I should have been, had you not been here. You don't know yet, Nettie, all that it costs a woman to be a soldier's wife. We are so close to our husbands when they are here, and so much shut out from the rest of the world, that we seem to be drawn into one being; and then comes the separation, so sudden and so hopeless, when for months at a time we are doomed to wait in weary, aimless longing, when all we know is that they are in deadly peril, from which no act of ours can save them. Ah, Nettie, if you are wise, child, put away the soldier from your heart, for you must suffer sorely if you link your fate with his."

Nettie listened thoughtfully, stroking the soft white hand of Mrs. St. Aure caressingly. Then she slipped in her little artful question:

"And are *you* sorry you married *the General?*"

Mrs. St. Aure started, and drew away her hand sharply. She threw up her head.

"My Bertie! The crown of my poor life! Sorry! Child, I would die ten thousand deaths for him! You don't understand."

Then she fell into a fit of musing aloud.

"Ah, how often I have dreamed of the time when he would never come back to me—in the nights when I lay awake by his side, listening to the rain on the roof. We were so happy then; and yet all the time that haunting spectre of a thought would come between us, that one day he should be brought back to me, cold and white, never to speak to his Elsie again! Oh, Bertie—not yet, not yet—a little longer, my own!"

Nettie looked timidly up at her companion, who had forgotten the presence of another. The usually quiet and placid lady was transformed for the time. Her dark eyes were fixed longingly on the desolate gray sky above the buildings on the other side of the fort, and her hands were clasped, while her voice had taken an indescribable tone of agony in the anticipation of what might be coming. Then the young girl felt abashed in the presence of a possible calamity greater than her own, and began to realize, dimly enough, the tremendous gulf that lies between the love of the maiden and that of the wedded wife of many years. The prospect helped her to bear her own pain, and once more she took Mrs. St. Aure's hand and kissed it softly.

"Please forgive me," she said. "I have been ill, you know, and talk wild, Mrs. St. Aure."

The kind lady was herself again in a moment at the appeal of suffering.

"Never mind, my dear," she said cheerfully. "We *are after all only two* silly women, and torment ourselves

about nothing. Now you must be good, while I call Eliza to bring your beef tea. I wonder why Minnie hasn't been over this morning with your aunt."

"Aunt Isabel wanted to show her some——" began Nettie, as Mrs. St. Aure bustled about the room with ostentatious cheerfulness. Then the girl suddenly stopped, and her heart began to beat strangely. She heard a rapid step on the plank walk outside, and lo! there was Minnie Peyton, flying toward the house as hard as she could run, her light hair fallen down her back, and she never heeding it. Mrs. St. Aure, who was at the door, heard the step too, and turned her face to Nettie, when the girl's deathly pallor alarmed her.

"What is it, my dear?" she asked hastily.

"Something's happened! Minnie's coming!" gasped Nettie faintly; and then indeed Mrs. St. Aure started, while her face flushed. Forgetting her guest, the lady flew to the outer door and flung it open just as Mrs. Peyton ran up the steps panting and screaming:

"They're coming, Elsie! They're coming! Zieten's —come home!"

Mrs. St. Aure uttered a little scream.

"Where? where?"

Then Mrs. Peyton, still panting for breath, crying and laughing and throwing up her hands as she came, ran into the parlor and fell on the sofa, breathless, disjointedly telling her story, while Nettie, rousing from her first agitation at the other's evident frenzy of joy, listened anxiously.

"I was sitting in the back room—with Miss Lacy," panted the young wife, "when I saw something a long way off—coming—and I got the glass—and it was Zieten—and —and Bran—coming over the plains—straight—and I ran over—and I broke the glass—and oh! Elsie, they're coming *home*, they're coming home!"

Nettie hardly understood what was meant, till she

heard, away at the other end of the fort enclosure, the deep-mouthed baying of a dog. Then she looked out of the window, and lo! there were two great dun-colored greyhounds, with rough hair, bounding over the parade ground and barking loudly at every step. Mrs. St. Aure gave one hug to her sister-in-law, and then flew to the door, calling out:

"Here! Zieten! Bran! Here, dogs, here!"

Then, what a commotion in that hitherto silent and desolate house! The two huge dogs rushed in, perfectly frantic with delight, leaping up in the air and howling out their joy around their mistress, who on her part was strangely moved from her usual sedateness. Her cheeks, never quite pale, were flushed with a brilliant color, while her dark eyes and red lips seemed to ripple all over with smiles, as she petted the dogs and spoke affectionately to them in her sweet, low-toned, but very rich voice. Any man who had seen Elsie St. Aure in that moment of joy must needs have sworn that a more beautiful creature was hard to be found.

And what had occasioned all this joy? Nettie felt as anxious as ever, though she knew that they were the dogs of General St. Aure, without which he never stirred on march or scout; but she could not understand how the other women felt so certain that all was right.

She sat and looked out of the window through the fast gathering tears, listening to the glad voices of the two wives, talking to the dogs and each other, and quite oblivious of her for the moment; and she thought to herself, in the moralizing fashion of youth, that no woes were like hers, and that the world was very hollow and heartless.

How long she sat there she could not say, for it was growing dusk when the dogs came in, and the outlines of the barracks at the other side of the square were lost in the darkness before she was disturbed from the mournful

reverie into which she had fallen. Then it was that she heard the striking of a match, and the light flashed across her. She looked up, and Mrs. St. Aure was lighting the lamp, while Mrs. Peyton stood looking at the figure by the window with an expression of great interest and affection.

Nettie started and looked round the room. It was quiet, and the dogs had vanished, though in the bitterness of her reverie by the window—thinking how happy was every one in the world but poor Nettie Dashwood—she had noticed nothing.

All of a sudden impulsive Minnie Peyton—whose hair had somehow rearranged itself—flew at Nettie and hugged her with great violence, ejaculating in the most inconsequent and illogical fashion a string of disconnected propositions.

"You poor deserted mite!—to think we'd be so selfish—and no one here to tell you—oh, for my Charley!—yes, my love, you *shall* have him after all—he *shall*, or I'll tell Jim and Charley to make him—you're a darling, and he'll be thanked in orders—you ought to be proud, I tell you—even Bertie never had such an honor at his age—oh, Nettie, I'm so happy!—Charley's coming, and Jim and Bertie and all—and—oh, *aren't* you glad?"

"Now, Minnie," said the soft voice of Mrs. St. Aure, "do you want to excite the poor child into a fever by telling her everything at once. Nettie, my dear, the General will be here in a few days. The dogs have run home several times before this, and he always ties letters to their collars."

Now indeed Nettie flushed with excitement, for she began to understand the disjointed exclamations of Minnie Peyton.

"What does it say?" she asked faintly. "Is he——"

"*He is* safe with them," said Mrs. St. Aure in a manner of great tenderness, "and Bertie writes that he has

listinguished himself greatly. Would you like to see the etter?"

The medicine was good, for the color came into Nettie's ace, while Minnie Peyton whispered:

"He and Jim and Charley are all mentioned."

Nettie shook her head faintly.

"I'm afraid I could not see it. Please read."

Mrs. St. Aure showed her a sheet of thin paper that ad evidently been folded very small for the canine letter-arrier, and read aloud:

IN THE FIELD, LITTLE MISSOURI, October 24, 18—.

To MRS. ST. AURE, FORT MARENGO:

All well. Struck Indian trail near Pompey's Pillar, and met Mr. Armstrong with Red Arrow and a *Tabard* reporter, just escaped from Standing Bear's camp. Found trail of camp moved, and soon met General Slaughter's column on another trail. Found the village had crossed the river, but had several skirmishes with the warriors, who rung round us. Made a night march, and struck a large band going o join Standing Bear. Mr. Armstrong and Red Arrow found the rail. Took herd of horses and burned the lodges. Killed 35 Indians. Lost Mr. Darcy and young Otard killed. Mr. Armstrong vas wounded, arrow in arm. Received orders to come back by way of Manley's stockade. Home by first November if the weather holds as it is. I think Standing Bear has gone north to cross the British ine.

H. ST. AURE.

The color faded from Nettie's cheek again, as she whispered:

"Is that all? He is hurt then."

Minnie Peyton showed her a second letter.

"From Charley, dear, to me. It tells the rest."

Nettie looked at her hungrily, but did not dare to ask ier wish. However, the young wife seemed to understand t, for she began to read aloud:

IN THE FIELD, LITTLE MISSOURI, Oct. 24, 18—.

TO MRS. CHARLES PEYTON:

We had a big fight last week, Minnie, and Jim led the charge into the Indian camp, along with young Armstrong, who turned up safe and sound, minus his clothes and plus several of the best war ponies in Standing Bear's camp. We broke the back of an Indian coalition by a stroke of luck, and the General has a fresh feather in his cap. Armstrong and Old Groutey had some hard words about Van Dyck when Armstrong came into camp, and the youngster was put in arrest by the General's orders, along with that Jim of ours, who must needs be into the row, as usual. They were only let out for the attack, and the General thanked them both before all the regiment after the battle. Captain Groutey, I must say, fought hard with his troop, but no one seems to have seen Van Dyck till the battle was over, when he turned up on foot, saying his horse had been shot early in the fight. So it was—in the head from behind with a pistol. There was a good deal of fuss, by the by, about Armstrong's bay, which Van Dyck was riding when the fugitives came into camp. The two are open enemies now, and never speak except on duty. Old Groutey took Van Dyck's side, and that's how the trouble began. The youngster called Van—well, a hard name for a soldier to carry—and Groutey put him under arrest, and then Jim went and told the old fellow he was no gentleman, and Jim got it from the General. It was laughable, if it *was* improper. However, it's all right now, and even old Groutey doesn't defend Van Dyck since the fight.

We expect to be home by the beginning of November, and if the dogs don't loiter, you'll get this about three days ahead of us.

Jim's just come in, and wants me to put this enclosure into my letter. Good-by. I feel as if I wanted a shave and clean clothes dreadfully. I look like a chimney-sweep.

Lovingly yours,

CHARLEY.

Then Nettie looked up, a rosy color in her face, and whispered:

"The enclosure. Whom is it for?"

Mrs. Peyton laughed.

"*Why*, it's one of Jim's pranks. He's actually had the *assurance* to write to *you*."

Nettie said nothing, but looked pleading, while a smile she could not resist crossed her face. Minnie Peyton handed her a letter which the girl snatched and hid away in her bosom a moment, then pulled out again, and handed to her friend, saying:

"I beg your pardon. You have been *so* kind. You have a right to read it."

"Not till you have seen it," said Mrs. Peyton; and she bustled away into the passage, calling the servant, while Mrs. St. Aure disappeared. So that Nettie Dashwood was all alone as she read Jim St. Aure's letter. It was very short and not dated, but addressed with her name, by itself, on the cover. It ran thus:

Arrow-wound quite slight, but enough for a sick leave. Your secret is safe, but your young man's an idiot. Such fellows always get the luck they don't deserve. Take an old fellow's advice, and drop him. Yours,

JIM.

When Mrs. St. Aure came in a few minutes later, Nettie stood by the fire, glowing with anger.

"That Colonel St. Aure is an impudent——" she began. Then she stamped her little foot. "The idea!" And Mrs. St. Aure only smiled in her bright way, saying:

"Poor Jim always blunders, my dear."

But Nettie seemed to be transformed. The pale, delicate invalid of a moment ago had given place to the old Nettie, quick, impulsive and vixenish.

"I must go before they come back," she said, with her face pale, but with a red spot glowing in the middle of either cheek. Then she compressed her lips and looked in the fire, as if fearing to meet Mrs. St. Aure's eye.

The kind lady looked surprised and a little offended as she said:

"My dear! Leave me now, when my troubles are over? You cannot mean it."

Nettie faced her for a moment, and the red flush covered her face and neck.

"But *I must*," she said, in a low tone. "I will not stay to be—*pitied*."

She had not offered to show Mrs. St. Aure the note which she had crumpled in her hand, and held tightly clenched.

"I have a commission still to execute," she went on, in a still lower tone, looking at the fire. "I was taken ill, and I found something the other day—a lock of hair—that I ought to have given to Juliet—from—my *friend*—who loves her. I have no right to keep it. Don't you think so, Mrs. St. Aure?"

The commandant's lady crossed the room and laid her hands on Nettie's shoulders, when the little girl held down her head and began to pick industriously at an imaginary thread on the skirt of her dress. Mrs. St. Aure spoke very tenderly.

"I shall miss you very much, my dear, but I will trust your sense, for I have found out that you are very different from what I once thought you to be. We will ask your aunt about it."

Nettie looked greatly relieved, for she and Miss Lacy had talked the matter over that very day. Thus it happened that when the Twelfth Cavalry rode into Marengo three days later, brown and ragged, war-worn and dirty, Madam Lacy and her niece were hundreds of miles off, speeding along the desolate stretches of the Canada Southern Road, past ghastly gray forests of girdled trees, standing like spectres in the waning light of the evening sky, looking sufficiently cheerless even from the window of a palace car. The girl sat close to her old relative, and for the time being there was entire peace and confidence between them.

The first question Jim St. Aure asked of his sister-in-law that evening, when they were in quarters, was:

"Where's my 'pert little thing,' Elsie? I don't see her."

"Thanks to *your* wise policy, she's gone," said Mrs. St. Aure, with a smile that had some sadness in it. "Ah, Jim, no wonder you never got married. You understand women as much as I understand Greek."

And Jim St. Aure made a wry face.

CHAPTER XXV.

EULALIE.

OLD Baptiste Conneau was moving slowly about the low, dark, old-fashioned parlor of the ancient farm-house that had once been the Brinton Manor. The old man looked more withered and dried up than ever, as he dusted the furniture. He had put on his dear old "Habitan" dress again, since he had been secluded in the country, a dress which made people laugh when they saw him in town. But Baptiste, being a Frenchman, and moreover a Canadian Frenchman, was as obstinate as they make men, and stuck to his woollen nightcap, leggings and frock, with all the tenacity of old age and Habitan blood.

Near one of the quaint windows with the diamond panes sat Eulalie Mac Diarmid, reading a letter; and Baptiste kept fidgetting about, as if he wanted to say something concerning this letter, which was indeed the truth.

Eulalie had dropped her former graceful, if rather odd dress, and was attired plainly in the ordinary deep mourning of a civilized woman. She looked pale and weary, and presently laid down the letter with a sigh. Old Baptiste was a privileged character in that house. He had been the servant of the elder Mac Diarmid at the Hudson's Bay Fort, long years before, and had nursed all the children of the Highland chief and the Indian princess.

"Mademoiselle is ill, perhaps," said the old servitor, insinuatingly, when he heard the sigh.

"No, Baptiste," said the girl, in an absent tone; and *then she sighed* again.

The old man fidgetted about a little while longer, in a fever of curiosity.

"Monsieur, then, is ill, perhaps?"

"No, Baptiste," said the girl, and then she sighed again.

"And Monsieur Rouge?" said Baptiste, inquiringly.

"He is well," replied the girl, in the same absent tone: then she roused herself a little. "They are coming home, Baptiste."

The old man dropped the feather-brush.

"*Grace à Dieu!*" he exclaimed, with French fervor. "Oh, that I am happy—and yet—he will miss madame. She was, it is true——" Here he filled a gap with his expressive shrug. "But what would you? A mother is sacred—yes, a thing sacred. He will miss her."

Eulalie sighed again.

"Yes; and he will find me all alone, where I have been ever since he left us for Manitoba."

Baptiste fidgetted about again, and finally blurted out, in his impassioned French:

"It is monstrous, when you might be enjoying the life Parisian, that you should be condemned to wear out your days in a prison, for the sake of that race savage, to which no tie is left to link you. *Ohé!* Mademoiselle, that I could see monsieur, to tell him!"

"You will have a chance very soon, Baptiste," said Eulalie, with a faint smile. "He will be home to-day, and he says he goes to the plains no more till next summer."

"Why should he go at all?" growled Baptiste. "He could have led the life happy here——"

"No, no," interrupted the girl, quickly. "You forget. Not here, Baptiste, where not a soul has called on us since we entered the house."

"Except one, mademoiselle. You forget, too," said the old servant. "That lady so pretty, with the eyes so dark

they looked black when they were blue. She came, not once but five times, and was here but yesterday."

Eulalie curled her red lip and showed her white teeth.

"She came not to the house, but rode through the grounds for curiosity. *I* watched her."

Old Baptiste nodded his head.

"For all that, she comes; and the time may arrive when she will visit. She is the daughter of the former owner of this place, mademoiselle, and has been away in the West all the summer."

"Who told you all this?" demanded Eulalie, sharply.

"The grocer, who talks; the butcher, who chats; the baker, who jokes with Baptiste of his English. If I do not get out, they me bring the news, so that I am not stupid always." And the old man chuckled and nodded his head. "Oh, yes, I have heard all about it. Servants will talk, and I can listen. They say that the whole party was with the soldiers who were to fight with the friends of monsieur, out on the plains, and that one young lady is still out there with her aunt, sick with some fever in that frightful country. Me, I understand not how monsieur can go to that country, when he might be rich and happy here. It is a thing very curious."

Eulalie looked interested.

"You are sure that young lady was at the West, Baptiste?"

"But yes, mademoiselle. Perhaps—who knows?—she may have met monsieur there."

"Oh, no! Impossible, Baptiste. Ladies go not out with the soldiers; and, besides—you know what my brother's people are. They would have killed her."

Baptiste shrugged his shoulders.

"What would you have? Her people would kill one of *the* women of the tribe. But, praise to the good God, that

is all over now. Monsieur is coming home. And Monsieur Rouge—he is well?"

"Yes, Baptiste, and they should be here soon. My brother writes that he returns through Canada, the battles being over for the year."

"And still I cannot understand," said old Baptiste, "how monsieur can exile himself among those—— Bah it is inexplicabe how——"

He broke off abruptly, as the sound of carriage wheels was heard outside.

"*C'est lui! C'est monsieur! Grace à Dieu!*" cried the old man, hurrying from the room; while Eulalie, hardly less excited, followed. But no. There at the door stood the eminently respectable equipage of Judge Brinton, and a pompous servant inquired—actually inquired if "Miss Mac Diarmid was within?"

Then Eulalie shrank back, covered with blushes, to the parlor, in an agony of confusion. These grand people of the neighborhood had come to call on the neglected little half-breed, and the poor girl hardly knew what to do. She longed at that moment for her brother, for some one to tell her how to behave, for she was utterly ignorant of the conventionalities of society. But it was too late to retreat now. Baptiste, full of self-importance for the first time since they had been at the manor, was ushering in the pompous Judge and his cool, self-contained daughter; and poor Eulalie had to come out into the broad daylight of the parlor, and speak to her guests in the best manner she could assume.

That manner was sufficiently confused. She was scarlet with nervous shyness, and stammered out:

"*Bon jour*—I mean—goot day, monsieur. My brozair is avay. Mademoiselle, *permettez*—ah, I forget ze Engleesh *asseyez vous*—seet down. Vill you not 'ave glass wine aftair

your promenade? *Baptiste, ici, mon ami, de grace: ne laissez moi pas.*"

She was all alone, poor little creature, and had never before met such grand people as those who now surveyed her so coolly, while she was almost beside herself with nervous agitation.

However, Judge Brinton was not the man to lose the object for which he came, on account of a little bashfulness which he had expected, and he was too thorough a man of the world not to be capable of setting a timid girl at her ease.

"Do not disturb yourself, mademoiselle, I pray you," he said, in his most genial and fatherly manner, and in the French of a man who has travelled much. "I called partly on a little matter of business with your brother, but I am more than charmed that it has afforded me the opportunity of seeing his sister. Permit me to present to you my daughter, Juliet."

Eulalie was set comparatively at ease by the sound of her native tongue, for a French convent near Quebec had been the scene of all that she had received in the way of education, though that was very little to serve her in her present extremity.

She said nothing till Juliet advanced with her easy, languid grace, and spoke in her soft, rich tones.

"You must find it quite lonely here, mademoiselle. I hope we shall sometimes see you at the Beeches after this. It takes us a long time, out here in the country, to summon our courage and make a call, but we have so little society that we generally weary out our few friends after we begin. What a pretty parlor you have here; and how it is changed from what it was in the old times! Who provided that splendid head yonder? What is it?"

"It is the *ahsata*, that the Americans call the Big *Horn*," said Eulalie, timidly, but reassured by this ques-

tioning on familiar subjects. "My brother shot it in the mountains, when he was a youth."

Juliet started a little in affected ignorance.

"In what mountains? Not the Alps?"

"No, no"; and Eulalie actually smiled, for her courage was rising fast. "In the Rocky Mountains of the West."

Juliet raised her eyebrows in polite surprise.

"Indeed! Has he been there?"

"We were born there," said Eulalie, timidly, and then a burning flush covered her face. She was so used to meeting contempt where her origin was suspected, that she trembled under the eyes of this cool, quiet young lady.

"How romantic!" said Juliet, in her sweetest tones. "How I wish sometimes I had been born there: it is all so free and wild! I have just returned from the West, you know, and I had one day, which I shall never forget, out on the great green prairie. It was fairly magnificent, until there was an alarm of Indians, and that spoiled all. Oh, the wretches!"

Eulalie straightened up, and her dark eyes were aglitter in a moment. Her shyness had vanished.

"Why do you call them wretches?" she said. "They never harmed you."

Juliet gave a little shudder and laugh. She had no idea of the delicate ground on which she was treading, for the simple reason that she knew nothing of Eulalie's origin. She had seen Mac Diarmid, and in spite of her apparent terror at his appearance, had in reality been strangely attracted by the mystery that surrounded him and his lonely house. The Judge, for reasons that will appear further on, had breathed no word to her of the true character of the Mac Diarmids, and she imagined them to be Scotch, as their name betokened. Moreover, there was a vein of romance in Juliet, suspected by no one, but by no

means uncommon in lymphatic women of voluptuous character, that induced her to weave all sorts of wild fancies about the descendant of a Highland chief, as she had been told by her father that this man was. The romance had hitherto evaporated in day dreams, as it often does in women of her temperament; but, given time and opportunity, there was no telling whither it might lead her.

"Ah, well, it's all over now," she said. "I used to think Indians were grand creatures till I went West and heard the officers talk about them, and saw them around the fort, so filthy and squalid. But never mind them. *You've* seen them often, I suppose."

Eulalie smiled, with glittering eyes. She was quick enough to understand that her guest did not know her origin; but for all that the Indian blood rose in her, and she felt at the moment a sort of insane, smothered longing to fly at the beautiful white throat of this splendidly formed young lady, who stood before her, uttering venomous words about her mother's race.

"Yes, I have seen them," she said, "and I have seen them do things no white man could do. I have seen a warrior draw his bow and bring down a wolf at full speed from a horse that flew over the plain. I have seen them ride as no white man ever dared to ride."

"Indeed!" said Juliet, in a tone of interest. "That must be fine. I suppose *you* ride, Miss Mac Diarmid?"

"I did—once," said the girl, and her eyes became misty as she thought of the days before ever the convent had drilled her into self-conscious constraint, when she used to fly over the plains of Manitoba, as good a rider as any boy.

"We must take a ride together some day," said Juliet in her sweetest manner. "I love a horse."

Eulalie's face fell.

"No, no, not now. I ride no more here. My brother——"

She did not confess the truth, that she had never been on a side saddle in her life; for she had learned at the convent that civilized women do not ride in the same fashion as she did.

Here the Judge, who had been wandering up and down the room with his most benignant air, inspecting the heads of game and curious articles scattered about, as well as the books that showed the cultivation of the elder Mac Diarmid and Evan Roy, blandly addressed his little hostess.

"Mademoiselle, I see that your brother has a rich and well stored mind. Your library is beautifully selected. Your brother is absent, I think I heard you say."

"He has been at the West all the summer," said Eulalie, with another painful blush. "He wrote me that he would be back to-day, and I expect to hear the carriage from the train every moment."

Here old Baptiste, who had been fidgetting about ever since his little mistress had addressed him her first frantic entreaty to stay near her, in the extremity of her bashful terror, could stand it no longer.

"Does mademoiselle wish me to serve the tray?" he asked after a preliminary cough.

"Yes, yes—what am I doing?" said Eulalie, in her anxiety to be hospitable. "Quick, Baptiste. Thou knowest what to do, as in Quebec."

Baptiste vanished, and Eulalie looked out of the window to hide her confusion, after which she bustled about to keep herself from thinking how the two strangers were looking at her with quiet, critical eyes.

"I hope we shall see your brother soon," said the Judge, in his blandest tones: and then he gradually drew timid Eulalie into a conversation, till he had heard from her almost all the history of her simple little life, em-

boldened as she was by the fatherly interest which the wily old man of the world seemed to take in her.

In the mean time Juliet Brinton, rather bored by the trouble of speaking to her hostess, who was so bashful, lay back in a large armchair by the fire, and almost fell asleep. She was conscious of the buzzing voices of her father and Eulalie, and that the Judge was asking leave to see something in the old house that Eulalie said had been altered, and then she dozed away into real oblivion as they left the room.

It was then that she dreamed a strange dream. It seemed that she was possessed by a strange feeling of utter powerlessness to stir hand or foot, while she fancied that some one was near her. She could not even utter a cry, though she felt completely fascinated with terror. Then a soft, deep, sweet voice said in the dream:

"You can open your eyes now."

It seemed to be by some volition other than her own that Juliet opened her eyes and found them fixed on the great, luminous orbs of Mac Diarmid. There he stood, his long black hair flowing down on each side of his dark face, with its firm jaw and high aquiline nose. He was dressed as if for a promenade, in the height of fashion, and a costly fur overcoat, open at the front, gave a certain distinguished air to his person.

Juliet saw all this in her dream, and it seemed to her that she took in every detail, with no sense of wonder, but felt incapable of saying a word. A vague terror that had possessed her at first, had given way to a sense of calm repose and perfect obedience. Mac Diarmid smiled, and she smiled back, but could say no word, till he waved his hands above her with a certain air of command, and said:

"You can speak now. Your name is——"

"Juliet," it seemed to her that she answered, with a *certain dull*, mechanical sound.

"Good Juliet," he said softly, "you are sleepy. Sleep."

Again he waved his hands close to her eyes, and it seemed to her in this curious dream that an irresistible sense of drowsiness crept over her, for she closed her eyes, and the dream vanished in darkness.

Then Mac Diarmid, who stood above her, smiled bitterly to himself.

"Red blood or white, I have her. They think they know the secrets of nature, these scientific men, and they cannot yet control the mind that lies in the nerves of a woman."

He heard steps in the passage, and quickly moved back to the other side of the room, where a door led into an anteroom and thence through a passage into the old-fashioned farm kitchen of the manor, where Evan Roy was warming his feet before the fire, no one else being there.

"Did ye find them?" asked Evan Roy.

"They were away. Strangers are in the house," said Mac Diarmid briefly. "Has not Baptiste come down yet?"

"No; they've not heard us. When the wagon comes wi' the baggage they'll come oot. Wha's the strangers, Mac Diarmid?"

"The daughter of the man from whom I bought the house," said Mac Diarmid.

Evan Roy made a gesture of surprise.

"Aha! I tauld ye the folk wad come roond at last to the chink o' the siller, lad," he said. "There's nae need to gang till the plain to get frien's in these days. Did ye speak till her?"

"She was asleep, Evan." And Mac Diarmid smiled with a certain air of triumph in his eyes.

Evan looked serious.

"I hope ye didna hurt her, Mac Diarmid. 'Tis an

awsome power ye can wield o'er a puir lassie that's sae feckless as to gie in till't."

"I'll not hurt her," said Mac Diarmid shortly. "Hark! There is Baptiste coming."

The steps of the old servant were heard in the passage as if in a hurry, and Baptiste burst into the kitchen, when he started back at the sight of his master and Evan.

"*Oh, Dieu! Que j'ai en peur!*" he ejaculated. "I thought I heard the carriage coming from the station; and lo! you are arrived, my master, my chief, my son! Ah! thanks to God!"

And this superstitious old Papist actually knelt down on the stone floor of the kitchen in his ecstasy of joy. Mac Diarmid, like the half-breed villain he was, encouraged the old man in his senile infatuation, and actually raised him up and kissed him on either cheek.

"What are they doing in there?" he then asked, pointing to the parlor through the closed doors.

"It is the old monsieur that sold the house is there, with a demoiselle that has been here before, but never came in," said Baptiste.

Mac Diarmid frowned thoughtfully, and muttered to himself: "What does he want here? We are not *his* kind."

"Will not monsieur go in?" asked Baptiste in a tone of respectful remonstrance.

"Not yet. Tell Mademoiselle Eulalie I have arrived. No, stop—how is my mother, Baptiste?"

The old servant's face changed as he stammered:

"Monsieur, is it possible you do not know?"

"What? Quick, Baptiste! Is she ill?" And the face of the half-breed villain assumed an expression of intense anxiety; for, wretch as he was, he actually had loved *the wild* wrinkled old Indian hag who had hidden herself

away so many years in the attics of her civilized husband's home.

"Monsieur, she is dead," said the old servant gravely.

And then that stubborn villain, who had concocted such diabolical plots against the best government the world ever saw, showed the ingrained wickedness of his nature in his first inquiries. He stepped up close to Baptiste and laid his hands on his shoulders.

"She received the rites of the Church? She was buried as a lady should be?"

Old Baptiste smiled proudly.

"Monsieur, she was treated as a lady of rank in a Christian country. The Father of St. Ambrose Parish was sent for, and the funeral was that of a princess. *Ohé*, monsieur, I know what is due to the family of monsieur. It is a strange country this. People who had never been near this house before came to the funeral and stared as if we were wild beasts. I flatter myself, monsieur, they could find no fault, for I trusted not to these country sextons, but sent to the great city, where one can get anything. It was grand, monsieur."

And then the half-breed softly patted the shoulder of his father's old retainer and said, "Good Baptiste! Thou hast done well. Go and call my sister."

When the old man had gone, Mac Diarmid turned to Evan saying, "What has brought those people here to-day, think you?"

Evan Roy shrugged his shoulders.

"It's the way o' the warld, lad. Yon's an auld warldling that'd sell his saul for siller, and sence the mither has gane, mayhap the mon thinks the son micht be cozzened——"

They were interrupted by Eulalie rushing in to welcome her brother and imploring him in the same breath to "come into the parlor. A lady is ill there. We cannot wake her, and I am frightened."

Mac Diarmid smiled ironically. "I am no doctor. How can I help her?"

"Come and see her?" urged Eulalie. Then in a low whisper: "She is beautiful as an angel."

Mac Diarmid followed her into the parlor, and as they entered found Judge Brinton standing by Juliet, who was just waking up. She had her back turned to the door, and the Judge was speaking in a low voice. They stopped instinctively as he said:

"Good Heavens! Juliet, my love, remember yourself. Do you know you have actually been asleep?"

Juliet rubbed her eyes and smiled.

"I believe I have, papa. Where are we?"

"My dear, we are at Miss Mac Diarmid's, and she has gone to fetch her brother. They will be here——"

Mac Diarmid coughed and entered. Juliet gave a nervous start and seemed to recollect herself in a moment, for she rose up and turned to greet the new comers. As for the Judge, he was one of those old men of the world who are never put out by any circumstances, however embarrassing, and he at once advanced to meet Mac Diarmid, ignoring the alarm of the moment before.

"Mr. Mac Diarmid, I am rejoiced to see you once more, sir. I see you have made some very pleasant improvements on your purchase. Just returned from one of your expeditions, I suppose. I hope you have enjoyed it."

And the Judge shook the hand of the rich half-breed as cordially as though he had been of his own blood.

"My daughter, Mr. Mac Diarmid," pursued the old worldling. "We have both been very much interested in your charming sister. You must let her come over to see us now and then. Here in the country, you know, it is a Christian duty to be sociable."

Mac Diarmid bowed low to Juliet, fixing his strange, *luminous* eyes on hers, and offering his hand, which she

ook without a word, her color fading and flushing in a trange manner.

"I am glad to see Miss Brinton in my house at last," aid the half-breed, in his deep, rich voice. "I hope my ister will see her often."

Then he dropped her hand and turned away to speak o the Judge, till Baptiste, laden with a tray, entered he room amid a clink of glasses. After that the ice eemed to be fairly broken for timid Eulalie, who ound herself, before long, conversing with Juliet Brinton rith a freedom that astonished herself, venturing her roken English and laughing at her own mistakes. This nformed little half-breed squaw was experiencing for he first time the efforts of a society woman determined o please, and all her previous distrust of Juliet vanished ike mist before the sun under the blandishments of the xperienced one. And all this time the Judge and Mac Diarmid conversed in a distant part of the room.

At last, however, they were gone, and then into the oom came Evan Roy, with:

"Well, lad, was I richt aboon the siller?"

"You were," said Mac Diarmid, gloomily. "These hite men are all the same. He knows me and keeps rom his daughter who I am. He wants me to invest noney in a security he says is good."

Evan chuckled as he remarked:

"I thocht as muckle. And ye tauld him ye were satisied wi' th' investments ye had."

"I did not," said Mac Diarmid briefly.

Evan whistled and made a grimace.

"Ye wadna venture the siller wi' the auld carle? Eh, mon, but thae Indians is a' the same feckless odies!"

Mac Diarmid laughed a bitter laugh.

"I am *not* such a fool as you think, Evan. I

have a purpose. My sister goes to his house and is received in this place before he sees my money; and then—we shall see."

Evan grinned delightedly as he ejaculated:

"He's my ain laddie. This dings the herdin' wi' wild sauvages a' to pieces. We'll see the Mac Diarmid haud up his head like a porn shentleman yet in this country. Ye hae the sense frae baith sides o' th' hoose, and I hae said it mony a time."

CHAPTER XXVI.

AT THE PLAY.

A BRIGHT moonlight night in Christmas week, with eight inches of hard-packed snow and ice in the streets of New York, the sleigh-bells ringing merrily up Fifth avenue and through the broad roads of the Park. A stranger arriving on such a night would never dream that, five or six months before, the same city had been sunk in tropical languor and exhaustion, men and animals falling dead in the streets from heat. That night was a vision of Stockholm, as the summer before had been an echo of Calcutta.

It was the third and last day of a cold north-wester, that followed on a heavy snowstorm—a specimen New York winter night. The two days before had been a bitter trial, with the wind blowing sixty miles an hour and the thermometer within five degrees of zero, when the warmest clothing could not keep out the keen blasts, that cut like razors, while the streets were full of powdery, whirling snow, showering from the housetops like diamonds, and frosting the faces of unwary passengers. All night long that wind had howled and moaned round the housetops, till it sunk to silence in the morning and ushered in a glorious, still winter's day, to be followed by such a night as those miserable mortals who are exiled from the metropolis of America never see.

It was a night to set the blood bounding through the veins and tempt one to all sorts of extravagances, while the place added *to* the intoxication. There is something in

New York, after all, which can be found nowhere else in the wide world, and to which the old New Yorker comes back with renewed zest. Paris is brilliant and gay, London is grand and smoky, Vienna has its gardens, Rome its Vatican; but New York has a taste of everything, and that charm of variety which takes in a whole world. A Japanese and a Hindoo, a Manchester cotton spinner or a Paris *élégant*, can find compatriots and congenial occupation in that cosmopolitan city, where every one is at home and there are no exiles. And yet the charm of New York is not in its completeness, for everything is unfinished. It lies rather in the aspect of eternal youth that possesses it, and in the constant changes which it is undergoing, which make it pre-eminently the city of promise, the metropolis of the future, of which anything and everything may be predicted.

This night was so glorious that it seemed as if every one must be out of doors enjoying it, but nevertheless the theatres were crammed. There is a refinement of luxury on such a night in driving to a first-class theatre, to be followed by a long, brilliant sleigh-ride and an epicure's supper in the small hours, that is very enticing to those who have money; and this luxury was keenly appreciated by one party at least on that night.

In a private box at the side of the stage in the Bijou Theatre sat this party; not large, but very happy. There were two ladies and two gentlemen, and the contrast between each and all of them was as great as could well be imagined. There was no mistaking General St. Aure, even in citizens' dress, for anything but a soldier. His tall figure, deep-chested, broad-shouldered and thin-flanked, was as powerful as ever in the closely-buttoned brown frock-coat; while his strong, serious face, with its heavy blonde moustache and bushy eyebrows, was easily recognized anywhere. His little wife, rosy and dimpling with smiles, sat

in the front of the box, contrasting strongly in her dark beauty with the finely-developed figure of the blonde who sat beside her, the picture of a grandly handsome woman of fashion. The fourth member of the party, a small, dark gentleman, with a closely-shaven face and very fine brown eyes, looked like a boy beside St. Aure. Something in his countenance, its serious, self-possessed look and the entire absence of beard, suggested either the clergyman or the actor; but the absence of the inevitable white choker precluded the first supposition. It was during one of the *entr'actes*, when conversation was unrestricted through the theatre, that St. Aure said:

"How queer that you should come home to-night, Cash. I shouldn't have had any one to grumble to me without you, you unmitigated old growler."

Mr. Cassius Carton had a sly twinkle in his eye as he said: "No; but I should have escaped all your Munchausen stories about Indians. As it is, I suppose I'm to be a victim. How many scalps, Horatio?"

The General screwed up his face, as he said, indifferently:

"Gave 'em all to Mrs. Carton to put in her what-d'ye-call-'em—switch. How many critics have called you a shocking bad actor since we met? That's more to the purpose."

"Sir, the inquiry is worthy of one of the minions of a hated despotism. Truly now, the papers say that Standing Bear stole all your horses, and you had to come back to the fort on foot. Shame on you, Bertie. A soldier, and afeared of a painted varmint!"

"I was reading in the *Tabard* this morning that Mr. Carton, the eminent tragedian, was going into a new line of business—minstrel, I think they said—in consequence of his disastrous failure out in Ohio, where he tried to act Hamlet," said the General, with a twinkle of his eye.

"Yes, and the *Tabard* says that Standing Bear has a great contempt for cavalry, and only fears the walk-a-heaps," replied the actor with the same serious face.

Here Mrs. St. Aure turned her head and looked gravely at the pair.

"Can't you two stop quarrelling?" she said, in her soft, pleading tones. "You're always at it when we're in a mood to enjoy life. Bertie, dear, don't tease poor Mr. Carton so. It's not polite, to say the least."

"It's all his fault," grumbled St. Aure. "The great overgrown ruffian thinks he's got me in his power because I've got no guards to protect me. He's always picking at me with his stale jokes."

"Then why don't you obey orders?" asked the actor in the same tone. "I told you to bring me Standing Bear's scalp, so I could play Metamora properly, and you neglected your duty."

Mrs. St. Aure was about to speak again in the same accent of half-amused expostulation, when her lady companion touched her arm and said: "Don't, you silly woman. They're only trying to make you believe them in earnest. I believe those two couldn't be happy if they weren't chaffing each other. It's Cash's fault. All these actors are the same: you can't get a serious word out of them, except on business."

"Yes?" said the little wife inquiringly, with her bright, sweet smile. "Isn't it strange? Bertie's just the same, off duty. You wouldn't believe the tricks he plays. But Mr. Carton's different; so quiet and sober. I couldn't fancy *him* playing pranks like Bertie."

"You don't know him yet, Elsie," answered the actor's wife, with a fond glance at her husband. "Cash is as full of his fun as the General, for all he looks so quiet. I suppose *it's* the relaxation after his work in heavy parts."

Ting! went the prompter's bell, and all four turned

their faces to the stage without another word, while the General and his wife became as much absorbed as two children at their first play.

In truth the St. Aures, away from the plains, were very much like happy children, let loose for the holidays. The summer had passed in labor, hardship, responsibility, and separation; but St. Aure had gathered the flower of safety from the nettle of danger, in that campaign, as often before, and had obtained his reward in the coveted leave of absence for the two cold months. Once fairly in the train from Marengo, both seemed to throw all care to the winds, and to be intent only on seeing everything to be seen, and reaping the utmost enjoyment out of life. They had come to visit their old friend Mrs. Carton in New York, not expecting to find her husband, who was supposed to be starring the West; and lo! the very night they arrived, the truant came in too, on one of his periodic flying visits, "to see the chicks," as he expressed it. Then it seemed that for one night their happiness was complete; for a singularly ardent friendship had long united the General and the actor, and when they were together, nothing seemed wanting. Like most men very closely attached to each other, they never showed it except by a constant rallying, always ironical.

For instance, when Cassius bantered his friend on his Indian stories, it was because the General was usually close as an oyster about his own exploits; and when Bertie alluded to the failure of Cassius at the West, he referred to the greatest ovation ever given an actor, in a town where he was a favorite, and in his best part.

Now, however, all four were oblivious of themselves and absorbed in the last act of "Camille," where that favorite emotional actress, Miss Gushleigh, was enacting the dying woman of pleasure in her best manner.

It's all very well for critics of the Philistine school to

cry down "Camille" and her Italian sister "La Traviata" for their "moral tone"; but one thing is certain: as long as the human heart remains in the soft state in which the Almighty framed it, unblessed by the case-hardening processes of Gamaliel and his fellow Pharisees, so long will simple folk weep at the tale of "one more unfortunate."

As for St. Aure, the stern soldier surrendered at discretion to Miss Gushleigh, and wept unrestrainedly in the back of the box; while the tragedian, whom one might have thought hardened by custom, sat in the darkest corner, and only emerged when the curtain was down, putting away his handkerchief in a shamefaced manner. Strange to say, the persons least impressed by the drama were the two ladies, though both cried surreptitiously at intervals; but they were perfectly cool when it was time to go.

Then said Mrs. St. Aure, in her sweet voice:

"Bertie, did you see any one you knew, just now?"

"No," said the General, suddenly blowing his nose with unnecessary violence, as an excuse for wiping his eyes by stealth. "I wasn't looking, Elsie. I was listening."

"Well, dear," said his wife calmly, but not noticing his discomfiture, as some women would have done: "*I* saw some one, I can assure you. Our little friend Nettie Dashwood, with her aunt, was in the box opposite."

"Eh, what? Not the little bony girl!" said the General eagerly. "What a pity Jim and Armstrong are not here—eh, Elsie?"

Mrs. St. Aure smiled and shook her head as her husband arranged her cloak to go out.

"If it *is* to be, they'll find each other, as we did, Bertie," said she, in a low voice. "You forget that he loves some one else, just now."

"Never mind," said the General, in his positive manner. "I'll trust Jim to pull that thing straight yet. He's as persevering as Red Arrow on a blind trail."

They followed the stream of people out, and found awaiting them that sleigh and pair which was to complete the luxury of the evening. Within ten minutes after, they were flying up Fifth avenue, amid a throng of vehicles, with the moon straight overhead, and every one laughing and joking. No one would have thought that the four bright, happy frolickers, like overgrown children, were the same who had been weeping over the sorrows of *La Dame aux Camellias*, a short time before.

It was indeed Nettie Dashwood and her aunt, whom the St. Aures had seen in the box opposite. The old lady looked wonderfully improved since the languid days of yore. Fort Marengo and plenty of travelling since, had given a tone to her voice and a color to her cheek which it had not known before. The old lady had, in fact, made a discovery, and found a cure for invalidism. She had found that her little spitfire of a niece, with whom she had quarrelled all her life, was dearer to her than any one else in the world; and she had worked so hard to nurse her back to life, after the discovery of the poor child's secret at Marengo, that a new interest had sprung up in her own life.

Nettie looked better than she ever had in all her life. Her old self-asserting, defiant air was replaced by a tender, pensive look, and the former sharp angles of her active little figure had rounded into a supple grace that disproved St. Aure's epithet of "bony little girl"; while a delicate wild rose bloom on her cheek had supplanted the paleness which had once made her face unattractive save for its expression in action. She had always possessed glorious gray-blue eyes and a beautiful mouth and chin, while the slight upward curve of her little nose was by no means unattractive to some people. Altogether, she was a much more charming person than the vixenish little hoyden who had horsewhipped Van Dyck on a certain memorable occa-

sion, and her unhappy experience had decidedly improved her. She had entered Fort Marengo a quick-tempered, high-spirited schoolgirl; she left it a woman, with all a woman's weaknesses and virtues.

As they stood at the door of their box and looked doubtfully out at the crowd, they were joined by Cornelius Van Dyck, who came up, wrapped in a big ulster and redolent of something that Miss Lacy at once detected.

"I *do think,* Cornelius," said the old lady sharply, "that when you are invited to accompany *ladies* to the theatre, the *least* you can do is to stay in the box for the *last* act, and not go off to *drink and smoke* with your companions. It is *by no means* a pleasant position for us to be left in without an escort."

Cornelius offered his arm with a muttered half excuse.

"Couldn't help it, Aunt Isabel. Met a friend. Here, Net, hook on. Sleigh waiting."

"But you've *no business* to meet friends when you're escorting *ladies,*" said Miss Lacy severely, as they pressed through the crowd. "Your army friends——"

"Wasn't an army friend. Haven't got any army friends," said Cornelius sullenly. "Wish you'd drop the army business, Aunt Isabel. I don't cotton to it. I've left the army, and I wish I'd never seen the thing."

Nettie, who was listening with averted head, smiled ever so slightly and murmured under her breath:

"I've no doubt of it."

It was characteristic of the change in the girl's character that she did not say this aloud, as she would have done six months before, when she openly detested and fought with Van Dyck on every possible occasion. For all that, he caught the low murmur of her voice, though not the words, and glanced savagely at her. How much she knew of his affairs he could not tell, but he was aware that she *received* letters from Mrs. Peyton at Fort Marengo, and he

feared all sorts of things—the more so, that he knew there was much in his career that would be none the worse for concealment.

"Well, for my part," said Miss Lacy, "I cannot see why you should have left it so suddenly. A gentleman of family can hardly find a better position than that of an army officer; and yet, the first thing I know, you must needs join us at Charleston with the information that you had resigned. I wonder at General St. Aure permitting you to go in that manner."

Van Dyck ground his teeth with an air of bitter malignity.

"Oh, curse St. Aure and all his fanatical clan! He was only too glad to get rid of me; but, by Heavens, I'll be even with him for it. Never mind. Here's the sleigh. I won't come in. I hate sleighs. Good night. I'll see you in the morning."

Then, with hardly the semblance of politeness, the young man hurried the ladies into the sleigh, and was turning away when Miss Lacy observed:

"Very well, Cornelius. I suppose you've forgotten that we take the train to the Beeches to-morrow morning. If you're not on time, we shall not wait, if I have to go alone."

Van Dyck turned instantly, and made a sullen sort of half-apology.

"I'll be on time, aunt; but I really hate sleighs. Good night."

Then they jingled away to the hotel, where Miss Lacy and her niece were sojourning after the prolonged trip to which she had treated Nettie and herself, while Cornelius shambled sulkily away up the street.

The truth of his disappearance was that he had seen St. Aure, and had feared to be recognized; for, deep in the young man's spirit, there seemed to burn in fiery let-

ters the words with which St. Aure had endorsed the letter of resignation which Van Dyck had written in Marengo at the close of the Indian campaign. They were few and simple:

Respectfully forwarded. The service will benefit by the resignation of this officer.

H. St. Aure.

That was all, but Van Dyck writhed in spirit, as he thought of the meaning attached to them, and he ground his teeth again.

"Oh, curse his haughty face! If I could only be even with him and see him down once! I'd crush him to pieces under my heel—so!"

And he stamped savagely at the pavement, then reeled back and slipped down from the careless push of a tall gentleman escorting a lady, who was bringing up the rear of the last party coming from the theatre. Van Dyck had not been looking where he was going, and had run up against St Aure himself, who had brushed against him and sent him flying back.

"Jump in, Elsie. Nothing the matter. Only some drunken fellow," said the General carelessly, as he helped his wife into the sleigh, remaining himself on the sidewalk till the last person was in. Then he turned round and looked full on Van Dyck, who was sitting up, gazing stupidly at him.

"Is that all?" said St. Aure, with a smile. "Then I can go on."

A moment later, he was spinning away across Union Square, Van Dyck still sitting on the sidewalk and looking after the sleigh.

CHAPTER XXVII.

OLD FRIENDS MET BY CHANCE.

WHEN Cornelius Van Dyck rose to his feet it was with a sickening sense of humiliation and defeat, which was slowly replaced by a burning desire for revenge in some form or other. He felt a strange sinking at the heart as he thought of a possible physical contest with St. Aure, and ground his teeth with fury at the remembrance of his own powerlessness, just proven. But Van Dyck was not entirely a coward. Few men of his size and strength are, in the presence of a foe who is apparently weaker than themselves. It is only in the presence of a danger against which their strength cannot avail, that the white feather displays itself, if it exists in them. Van Dyck knew his own infirmity, and he also knew the way to conquer it for a time. He had not drawn his descent from Holland ancestry without learning the virtues of that quality which is libelled under the name of Dutch courage. He had only taken a single drink that night, and it had failed to steady his nerves to the point of defying St. Aure, as he had intended to do. Moreover, he had been surprised, as he reasoned to himself, and his spirits began to rise as he reflected that, after all, it was a slippery night, and any man might have fallen as he had done.

"Curse his impudence!" he muttered. "I'll be even with him yet. I couldn't strike him before ladies, any way; and he was afraid to stop behind. He ran away. But the time *will* come——"

And with that vague threat this unfortunate gentleman

in search of a difficulty started off up Broadway to a well-known saloon, where billiards and drinks are dispensed with equal freedom, and where the sporting world, to which Cornelius had always been addicted, congregates nightly.

As Van Dyck entered this temple of Bacchus he looked around in search of some friend, but found none till he had wandered through the crowd for some minutes. Then he suddenly paused near a table, for he heard a voice he remembered—a voice resembling the sawing of wood on a cold day—and it came from a stout gentleman whose back was toward him, while the bald spot on the crown of his head was surrounded with black hair.

"You'll have to give me twenty-five points, Mark Meagher," said this harsh, rasping voice. "You temperance fellows can afford that to us broken-down old soldiers. Ha! ha!"

There was no mistaking the gigantic laugh that followed. The stout gentleman might be in his shirt-sleeves, and his dress might be that of a rather slouchy citizen, but the laugh was the laugh of Adolphus C. Slaughter, Brevet Major-General, U. S. A.

Then Van Dyck shrank back into the crowd, for he feared to be recognized by officers who knew the close of his career in the army, and he dreaded the cool, cynical eyes of the newspaper man still more. He had read Mark's double-leaded article in the *Tabard*, headed, "STANDING BEAR! AN INDIAN COUNCIL REPORTED VERBATIM FOR THE TABARD BY OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT"; and he knew Mark himself by sight. His mortification was still too fresh to admit of his meeting any army men except his old cronies, and the only one of them on leave, as he knew, was Burke. Old Groutey and all his set were still on the plains, and it seemed to Van Dyck as if only his special foes had received leaves that winter; for he had seen in the *papers the* names of several of those whom he and Groutey

had often stigmatized over their cups as "the St. Aure clique." He turned and threaded his way through the crowd to the bar, where he looked around once more for a friend, for Cornelius, with all his faults, was not a solitary drinker. Then he felt himself touched on the shoulder in a firm and imperative manner, while a soft, melodious voice said:

"We have met at last, Mr. Van Dyck."

Cornelius turned and looked up. He was, as we know, a tall and heavy-built man, but he had to look up to see the eyes of the person who stood beside him. They were magnificent eyes, by the way, large, dark and lustrous, shining out from a very dark face, perfectly smooth and hairless, with broad, firm jaw, a long, aquiline nose, coming down over smiling lips, and glossy black hair falling on each side of the cheeks. Cornelius was puzzled and startled. He could not exactly remember the face; but there it was, smiling sweetly down on him, with a certain evil glitter in the eyes that contradicted the lips, the image of Lucifer put in flesh.

Cornelius looked at the smiling face and said: "You are mistaken, I think"; then stepped back and eyed the other from head to foot with some curiosity.

The stranger was a model of slender grace, but his frame did not promise much strength. He was fashionably dressed, but with much extravagance of color and jewelry. For instance, his satin scarf did not absolutely require a thousand-dollar diamond for a pin, and his brown frock-coat would have been less rakish in appearance had it not been faced with velvet, while diamond rings such as he wore are only appropriate for professional sporting men or stock brokers. Cornelius at once jumped to the conclusion that this man was a gambler, and wondered what the stranger could want with him.

"I do not know you, sir," he said, finally," after he

had surveyed the other carefully, from his small boots to his fur-lined overcoat. Then he unbuttoned his own ulster and turned away, with the same strange sinking feeling at his heart which he had experienced when he met St. Aure, while he hurriedly felt over his right hip for something. Apparently he found it, for he kept his right hand there, and slapped loudly on the bar with his left, calling: "Whiskey! Quick! I'm in a hurry."

The dark stranger stood back till Van Dyck had emptied a tumbler nearly full of the fiery liquor, before he said a word. The same equivocal smile was on his womanlike face. Then, when Cornelius had paid for his drink and had turned round with a certain swagger in his air, still keeping his right hand at his hip, the other man raised the polished cane he carried and tapped Van Dyck on the shoulder.

"We have met at last, Mr. Van Dyck," he repeated in a clear, loud tone. "You have a shorter memory than I have, sir. I remember *you*."

Cornelius changed color a little, but the liquor was fast beginning to give him courage, for which purpose he had deliberately drunk it. The ominous smile and evil eyes of the stranger did not deceive him: he felt that he had some quarrel on his hands, though he did not as yet know the cause.

"Well, sir," he said, in as firm a tone as he could command, "I have forgotten you. Who are you?"

"I was, once on a time," said the other placidly, "in company with some young army officers, fresh from the Point, and they told me a cadet had just been dismissed thence, through the report of an officer—a civil appointment, by the by, and not on duty at the Point, but visiting a friend on leave, and acting as a volunteer spy on the cadets after taps."

Van Dyck looked up into the other's face, and a dim

memory seemed to struggle into his mind. But the influence of the whiskey was now complete. He felt calm and careless of consequences, and walked out into the middle of the room.

"Well, sir," he said, "what is all this to me?"

"A very little," said the stranger; "but enough for me. My name is Mac Diarmid. You will understand me better now. The sneak and informer who cost that cadet his commission, the coward who has since been compelled to resign his own, was named Cornelius Van Dyck."

Cornelius had kept his hand on his hip, looking the other in the eye, during all this speech, while Mac Diarmid, with his light cane tapping the inside of his polished boot, stood eyeing him with apparent carelessness, about three or four feet away. As usual in such cases, there was something in the looks of the two men that had attracted the attention of the loungers, and people had drawn away from them to look askance, though they were not yet the centre of a circle of spectators.

As Mac Diarmid hissed out the word "coward" from between smiling lips, Van Dyck drew his hand half out of his hip pocket, and as his own name fell on the air, rendering the insult complete and public, he pulled out his pistol and raised it with a furious oath.

Crack! whack! crack!

The motions were slight and almost imperceptible, as the tall youth struck Van Dyck a stinging cut on the wrist, knocking the pistol to the floor; and the second and third slashes of the elastic weapon took the bulky youth on each side of the face, leaving two white welts on his fiery countenance. It was all done in an instant: the next, a number of men had surrounded Van Dyck, and were holding him back, as is always the case in a crowd, when the least dangerous man is sure to be collared by the peace-loving by-standers.

Mac Diarmid drew back to a pillar, against which he leaned and looked calmly on, while Van Dyck raved for vengeance; and Evan Roy, who had been standing unnoticed within three yards of his chief, quietly picked up the pistol, extracted the cartridges, and handed them gravely to the barkeeper, before the clamor of voices was still.

Then Van Dyck, the white welts turned to crimson and showing conspicuously out of his face, ashy with vain fury, looked into the crowd that surrounded him with a haggard glance, and beheld Mark Meagher, General Slaughter, Jim St. Aure, Frank Armstrong (with his arm in a sling), and Captain Burke, all in the front line and all looking at him. It seemed to him as if all the world had gathered to witness his disgrace and was sneering at him, and yet he knew when he entered that the billiard room was a favorite resort of army officers on leave.

There was Mac Diarmid, opposite to him, smiling with the same devilish coolness; and a short man with a huge red beard, whom he had never seen before, was advancing to him, holding his pistol by the barrel.

"'Tis an unco feckless fashion, ganging aboot the toon wi' these pops, my young frien'," said Evan, in his quaintest manner and strongest accent. "I hae drawit the chairges, for fear o' an auccident. Gin I'm no mistaken, ye droppit this, sir."

And he handed the pistol with a most polite bow to the now horribly humiliated young man, while a titter of amusement ran through the room; and people began to turn away, sure that the fun was over. All the color had left Van Dyck's face, as he took the pistol from the hands of the old Highlander.

"You may laugh," he said, in a low, bitter tone. "You have the drop on me this time, you and your friend; and I'm alone."

But just as the crowd was breaking up, and he was

turning to go out, feeling thoroughly disheartened and disgraced, he felt some one run an arm under his own, while the hearty, friendly tones of Captain Burke said:

"Me poor boy! Van Dyck! Ye won't go thus, while Mat Burke's here. Be the powers, I'll stand your friend any time. We'll call the scoundrel out, so we will. Who is he?"

Van Dyck clung to his only friend with a gasp of relief.

"He's been at West Point. It's an old quarrel," he said. "Get the meeting arranged as quick as you can. You'll find me at the Balmoral Hotel. For God's sake, don't keep me here now. All those fellows are laughing at me."

Burke snorted angrily.

"Be the powers, they'll not laugh at *my* principal long. Who's laughing?"

"Slaughter, and Armstrong, and that damned Jim St. Aure," groaned the unfortunate, moving toward the door. "And that reporter too! It'll be in the papers to-morrow."

"Ye're wrong there," said Burke gravely. "Slaughter knows nothing about the endorsement St. Aure gave ye, and bedad there's more than one thinks it was moighty severe. As for Mark Meagher, ye don't know him. He wouldn't spoil sport for all the papers just yet. But I'm thinkin' the divil will want to see the jewel, so he will."

"Well, arrange it how you please," said Van Dyck hurriedly; "only let me out *now*, and come to the Balmoral afterward."

"Consider the affair in *my* hands, me boy," said the worthy officer; and then the door slammed and Van Dyck entered a hack and drove to his hotel, completely prostrated by his humiliations of the night, all the rage taken out of him, and replaced by a dull sense of some gloomy impending fate.

Meantime, Captain Burke stepped back into the billiard room, where the crowd had already dispersed after the little fracas, and speedily discovered Mac Diarmid leaning against the same pillar, the same calm cynical smile on his face, as he daintily smoked a cigarette and tapped his boot with his cane. Near by was Evan Roy, looking, in a very glossy suit of black, like a theological student of advanced age and very stubborn beard.

Burke looked around for his friends, and saw Armstrong at a little distance, evidently in a brown study about something, and listening to Jim St. Aure, who was talking in a low tone. The fact was that Armstrong, who, except Mark Meagher, was the only person in the room who knew Mac Diarmid, was debating with himself what he should do; while St. Aure, mistaking his silence for ill feeling toward Van Dyck, was arguing with him on the folly of wasting a thought on his late foe.

Burke, innocent of all the complications round him, went straight up to Mac Diarmid, and offered his card with a bow of extreme politeness, saying:

"I've not the pleasure of yer name, sir-r-r, but I'm thinkin' we'll need small introduction after the little bit of trouble between yerself and me friend Mr. Van Dyck, whom I represent. May I beg—ah——"

And the Captain extended his hand with another bow, as if requesting the card of the other.

The young man smiled languidly as he drew out his card-case, which was as elaborate as his dress.

Burke inspected the card and bowed.

"Charmed to meet ye, Mr. Mac Diarmid; and if ye'll refer me to yer-r-r friend, I think we can arrange the business in a jiffy."

"My friend and kinsman, Mr. Evan Mac Diarmid, will attend to the matter, Captain Burke," said the half-*breed coolly*; and then he stalked away, leaving the *Irishman* together.

After that everything was peaceful. It is matter of record that seconds will frequently contract the most ardent friendships for each other, and in this case there was no exception to the rule.

"I've always found, Cawptain Burke," said Evan, "that business is a droughty thing unless it be wut wi' good Glenilvat, *hot*. Gin it be agreeable to ye, I propose we should adjourn to a preevate room and odder up a jorrum o' punch to mak the discooshion interestin'."

"The idea's an illigant one, Mr. Mac Diarmid," said Burke, heartily. "I foresee the pleasantest terrmination of this business for *us*, sir; whativer may be the result to our principals."

Then they strolled away, arm in arm, while Mac Diarmid, after staring deliberately in Mark Meagher's face and appearing not to know him, walked over to Armstrong and held out his hand.

"How are you, Armstrong?" he said, coolly. "How did you get on in the West? Sorry I couldn't be with you, but after all it's better fun in the city here. How's the arm getting on?"

Armstrong hesitated a moment. The impudence of the half-breed astonished him. Then he reluctantly put out his hand, for after all he remembered that it was Mac Diarmid's protection that had enabled him to escape to the medicine-teepee and so save his life in the end. So he said "Good evening," a little stiffly.

"I see by the *Tabard* that you and some newspaper man were actually in Standing Bear's camp," continued Mac Diarmid, in the same airy manner. "Is that really true, or only one of those buncombe paper stories, got up by the reporters?"

"You ought to know best," said Armstrong, in a tone of constraint. "It's not my place to speak of it *here*."

And he looked into the eyes of the half-breed with an

expression that plainly said: "Don't go too far, or I may."

Mac Diarmid smiled with the same covert irony which had distinguished him throughout his interview with Van Dyck.

"Well, well, I'd no idea you were so modest," he said. "I don't see how *I* should know. Since I left the Academy, I have had all I could do to attend to the estate, and it even kept me in the city all the summer. And so the story is really true, is it? I should like to see that reporter. He was a brave fellow, not to say audacious. Why, he must have the impudence of the devil himself."

"I only know one person to excel him," said Frank, with a significant look. "Yonder he is, at that billiard table, playing with General Slaughter."

Mac Diarmid extracted a gold-rimmed eyeglass from the bosom of his vest, and deliberately scanned the two.

"You don't say so?" he exclaimed. "It seems so strange to me, shut out from that wild life and condemned to musty accounts in a dingy office, to see these famous Indian fighters. So that is General Slaughter. Well, well, he doesn't look very ferocious now. I wish I could see that other celebrated fighter, they call 'St. Aure.' They tell me he is quite handsome."

"Hush! This is too much, Mac," said Armstrong, in a low tone, pulling him to one side. "There's the General's brother beside you."

"Indeed?" said Mac Diarmid, in the same tone of languid amazement. "Pray, my dear fellow, introduce me, if you don't think a dismissed comrade unworthy to associate with, when he's only a humdrum civilian."

Armstrong felt himself again under the domination of his comrade's will, as he had been years before, and under that mysterious influence—half love, half admiration—which had bound him to Mac Diarmid in academic days.

Just as he had, despite his unwillingness, once introduced his friend to Juliet Brinton, so now he introduced him to Jim St. Aure.

"My dear Colonel, I am positively charmed to see you," said the dark youth, in his sweetest tones. "It must be quite a change to you from the hardships of the plains to the luxuries and splendors of this city of ours. Eh, Colonel?"

Jim laughed good-naturedly.

"Yes—but I don't know as I should like it all the time. I don't go among the great people, you know, and New York soon tires me."

"Yes, I suppose so. After such a wild and romantic life it must be prosaic here. Ah! I sometimes wish I were able to be out there, but I must be content with this quiet life here."

"I should say that you manage to get a little excitement even out of that," said Jim, laughing again. "There wasn't much quietude about that little business I saw you engaged in awhile ago. You did that trick as neatly as I ever saw the thing done."

Mac Diarmid smiled the ghost of a smile. "Money can buy anything," he said, "even skill in combat. But that is a mere trifle. I suppose you Indian fighters are used to that sort of thing all the time. What does an Indian fight look like, Colonel? I suppose it must be terrible."

Here Armstrong seized him by the arm.

"Oh, come over here and see old Slaughter," he said, half laughing. "Colonel St. Aure and I don't know anything about Indian fights. Slaughter'll tell you."

Jim St. Aure, standing by the pillar, with a certain vague suspicion that something was hidden under the assumed innocence of the smooth-faced stranger, saw him taken over to the billiard table and introduced to General

Slaughter, whose grating voice and hoarse laugh soon became audible, while the General showed his teeth in his most affable manner.

Jim sauntered near enough to listen, and presently heard the stranger inquire, innocently:

"And how did you feel in those dreadful battles of which you speak, General?"

"Oh, thought it was bully fun! Ha! ha!" bellowed the General. "Miss it sadly here. Haven't seen a man killed since I left Kansas."

Mac Diarmid lifted his hands in amazement, and turned to Mark Meagher.

"And how did *you* feel when you were in the camp of Standing Bear?" he asked, sweetly. "I suppose you were thinking of kingdom come."

"No, I wasn't," said Mark, a little gruffly. "I was thinking I was the cheekiest man in the United States—but I was wrong." Then he added, in a low tone: "When's that affair of yours to come off with the other fellow? I want the *exclusive* news, and I'll keep it from the other reporters."

Mac Diarmid turned to Slaughter with the same sweet smile.

"How funny these newspaper gentlemen are, General! One never knows if they are in jest or earnest. And so you really enjoy an Indian fight? Well, well. By the by, Mr. Meagher, do you know Captain Burke, of the Twelfth Cavalry? He gave me this card a moment ago. Very cheerful, pleasant person he seems. Well, gentlemen, I must bid you good evening. My hours are not usually as late as this." And, with a graceful bow, this very queer young man was gone.

"I say, Armstrong," said Jim St. Aure, "that chap's got Indian blood in his veins, and I'll swear it. He's much

handsomer than most of them, but if the red stain's not there, I'm a fool."

"What do you think of him?" asked Armstrong, in an absent-minded sort of way.

Jim screwed up his face.

"I'd not like to have him fooling round any girl I was much in love with. He'd take almost any woman he chose."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BEECHES.

THE train rushed with clanging bells into the dirty little station of Brintonville on the Hudson as the sun was sinking low in the western sky; and quite a large assemblage of travellers got out of the cars on the rickety old platform. To look at Brintonville from the station one might fancy it was a dreadfully dirty place, but there is no denying that it is finely situated. Above you, on the right hand, towers a cliff, about a hundred feet high, cut away from the bank by the railroad, and the village climbs up a steep incline in straggling and picturesque disorder. On the left is the river, and there never is a time when a noble river like the Hudson is not beautiful. It stretches out, broad and gray as steel, winter and summer, until the snow comes; and on the opposite side are the wood-crowned slopes that border the foothills of the Catskills, made famous by the legend of the Dutch sleeper.

When our travellers alighted from the train on the day in question, the river was covered with a white sheet of smooth ice where rain had crusted the snow, over which, in front of a fresh north wind, several ice boats were skimming in a mad race. The station was full of people, Christmas greens were hung everywhere, and a great green arch, about a hundred yards from the platform, led the way into a lovely park-like place, crowded with magnificent beech timber, standing out against the snow, where a narrow *road* ran up the hill, toward a great yellowish-brown house, *faintly* seen at the top of the bank.

"And so that is old Brinton's place," said Jim St. Aure to his brother the General, as they got out of the car, together with Mrs. St. Aure and Armstrong. "Well, it looks as if it might keep out the rain in the summer. I shouldn't wonder if a man might worry through life after a fashion here."

Up came a civil and business-like servant, touching his hat. "General St. Aure's party? Sleigh ready, sir, if you'll give me the baggage-checks."

"They do the thing in handsome style, I must say," muttered Jim to Armstrong, while the General was helping his wife into the sleigh. "The old Judge knows how to return hospitality."

Clang! clang! went the bell, as the train moved out of the station; and they heard the screech of another, far away down the river.

"Please to step in, gentlemen," said the servant in a respectful tone, as the two young men were lounging about, looking at the view: "we've got to come back to meet the next train with Miss Lacy, sir."

"Indeed!" said Armstrong in a tone of surprise. "Is Miss Lacy coming home then?"

"Yes, sir. She's been off travelling with Miss Nettie, and telegraphed us she was coming on the lightning hexpress," said the man in the same tone of respect, with an unmistakable British accent.

Then they settled down under the robes and jingled up the few hundred yards that separated them from the house, in seignorial style, to be received at the door with distinguished grace by the young mistress of the mansion.

If there was any character in which Juliet Brinton looked better than another, it was in that of a hostess in her father's house. Here her finely developed figure and self-poised, mature air were seen at their best, while there was no question of her tact and experience. She had all

the advantages which wealth can give: a good education, completed by travel in civilized Europe, and accomplishments which had taken away that rust of provincialism which infects all people who have never left their native country. Her manner to each and all of her guests was distinguished by those fine shades of difference which mark the woman of the world, who can make each person think him or herself a special favorite for the time being. She was tenderly deferential to General and Mrs. St. Aure, with an eager attention to their slightest wish that was perfectly charming: to Jim St. Aure she behaved like an old comrade, while to Armstrong there was a certain distance of manner before the rest, varied by occasional glances of confidence when they found themselves separated from observation for a few moments.

And yet, to the young soldier, there was something inexplicable in her behavior, an avoidance of him and a partiality for general hospitality, that chilled him and set him to thinking. He noticed that she called on Jim St. Aure for assistance whenever she required some of those little attentions which gentlemen are always ready to give, and that his own aid was never required, while she fluttered round Mrs. St. Aure with the most anxious care, as if that healthy, whole-souled lady had been a delicate invalid. It was no better after the ceremony of reception was over and the guests had been ushered to their rooms to dress for dinner. The Judge had been as genial as his daughter, and had welcomed Armstrong with great apparent cordiality; but when the young man found himself alone, he had time to remember that neither Judge Brinton nor Juliet had exchanged more than a dozen words with him, and that neither had expressed any congratulations on his brilliant service of the summer, or even expressed solicitude about his arm, which was still in a sling, though he knew *how* his deeds had been spread forth in the *Tabard*, and

that the fact of his being thanked in orders for bringing important intelligence from Standing Bear's band had been made public.

"But it has not *promoted* me," he reflected bitterly. "No service, however brilliant, *will* promote a man in our army unless in war time, and an Indian war is only a continuation of peace in the views of our sapient government."

Armstrong had already, it will be seen, caught the tone of grumbling prevalent in the American army, so overcrowded with officers, and where seniority is the only road to promotion. As he was growling away to himself over the hardship of being "only a second lieutenant," and wishing he had been blessed with such luck as had fallen to St. Aure and all the "brevets" above him, who had won their rank in a civil war, he heard the whistle of the train at the station and remembered that Miss Lacy and Nettie were coming.

"Well, I suppose I might as well go away now," he muttered to himself as he looked gloomily out of the window. "That infernal old woman will be ruder than ever. I come back as I went, with nothing but a lame arm to entitle me to notice. I wish I'd never come at all. I was a fool not to spend my leave at home, but that Colonel Jim over-persuaded me. What does *he* know of that dreadful old woman? I thought we were rid of her when the General told me she was off travelling in the south. Then there's Nettie, poor, dear little thing! What a fool she must think me to come back alive after that infernally spooney letter I wrote. I wonder if she gave Juliet that lock of hair I sent her. She seems confoundedly cool over it. Hasn't asked a word about my escape; though, by Jove, it was as close a rub as I want to take again."

He remained staring moodily from the window, though the prospect was lovely enough to have banished gloomy

thoughts from the mind of any man not determined to be injured. The sun was setting in a glow of golden light, with one of those marvellously luminous pale green skies, changing into lilac and blue at the zenith, which sometimes come over a snowbound landscape in an American winter. The dazzling reflection from the river ice filled his room with a flood of glory, and three white-sailed iceboats were skimming to and fro, tacking up the river. Still Armstrong felt as gloomy as ever, and remained at the window, staring out on the carriage sweep before the house, till he heard the jingle of bells and saw the horses of the sleigh coming up from the depot.

A moment later he started in positive confusion, and muttered:

"Here's a nice to do! Well, if the Judge hasn't put his foot in it this time, I don't know who has."

And he laughed aloud at the idea which crossed him, his own ill temper vanishing in the prospect of the *contretemps* that threatened every one else.

There was Cornelius Van Dyck, his lumbering figure looking larger than ever in the huge ulster, and he was gravely handing out Miss Lacy and Nettie Dashwood.

Armstrong was still a young man, not much more than a boy; and all boys, however romantic, love excitement. The whole situation flashed on him in a minute: the Judge, perfectly innocent of harm, had invited the St. Aures to his house in requital of the summer's hospitality; and here was Van Dyck, a relative of the Judge and Nettie, coming to the same house, ignorant of who was there, to meet his former commanding officer, from whom he had parted in bad blood. He hurried his toilet to get down, and could hear the voices in the drawing-room in lively conversation that told him how the welcome of the new comers was progressing. His anxiety to see the meeting was increased by the fact that he knew the St. Aures's

rooms were in the back of the house, not commanding a view of the carriage sweep; but he was doomed to be disappointed in his expectations this time; for, before he could get ready, he heard the new party dispersing into different parts of the house, and knew the trouble was postponed.

"The Beeches," as the Brinton place was called, was large and rambling, part of it built in the ordinary semi-Italian style common on the Hudson, but of yellow brick, while at the rear was a huge square tower, like the donjon-keep of an old feudal castle, an addition made by a former owner of the place, one of the Lacys, from whose hands it had passed into those of the Judge. There was room—so it seemed—to accommodate any number of people; for guest-chambers were scattered all over the house, and no person ever seemed to be one too many.

Then Armstrong made himself look as well as he could, inspecting his figure in the glass with all the gratification that an army officer feels when he gets into citizen's clothes, much the same as that of a militia officer when he dons his new uniform. He had determined that night to make an impression on Juliet Brinton if the thing was possible, and he settled his blue scarf, with its neat little pin, in a self-satisfied manner, as he reflected that blue was his most becoming color. Then he emerged from his room and went down stairs, feeling that if Juliet failed to melt to him now, he might better give up all hope.

He found the drawing-room all silent and deserted, and sauntered about, inspecting books and pictures to pass the time. At last he came across a photograph-album, and he took it up as an easy method of whiling away a few minutes. The light was still strong enough, though the sun had set, and he settled himself in one of the Judge's enormous armchairs at the west window, where he was partially hidden from the view of any one entering the room,

while he turned over the pictures. There was the usual collection of historic faces—Lincoln, Washington, General Scott, Louis Napoleon, Eugénie, Victor Emmanuel and Queen Victoria—jumbled up with actors and actresses and family portraits. In the last Armstrong took the most interest, for he knew some of them. There was Madam Lacy, high-bred and venerable, with her silvery curls and thin, aristocratic face, smiling slightly.

"Who'd think she could be so infernally rude?" muttered the young soldier to himself; for he had never forgiven the old lady for stigmatizing him as a fortune-hunter. But a single Indian campaign and the sense of responsibility and danger had brought much sense to Armstrong, and as he looked at that delicate, proud face, like the portraits of Marie Antoinette, his own face softened.

"By Jove, the old lady spoke the truth," he muttered to himself. "I was a fool ever to think I could take a girl like Juliet to live on a sub's pay in a frontier fort. And yet——"

He gave a heavy sigh as he turned the leaf, and the next faces that confronted him were those of Juliet Brinton and Nettie Dashwood, facing each other. The young man sat and looked at them in the fast fading light of the western sky, and fell into a deep reverie. He beheld his mistress and his friend, and photographs never lie as to character. There was Juliet, serene, complacent, and self-possessed, her faultlessly moulded features and dark blue eyes reflected in all their marvellous perfection of form and color, but with no soul behind them, as he began to realize at last. It was a face like that of one of Titian's Venuses; soft, yielding, and full of voluptuous suggestion, but void of spirit and purpose. Opposite to her was Nettie Dashwood, thin, spiritual, eager; with great gray eyes, little turned-up nose, small sensitive mouth, with firm-closed lips, and, even in those old days, a certain look of [illegible]

hidden under the bright smile which she wore in the picture, while the fleecy curls round her forehead could not disguise its unusual height and character.

Armstrong looked at the two pictures long and steadily, till he heard a step behind him, and Jim St. Aure said:

"Yes, I've been looking at 'em too. They're up in my room, large. You may say what you please, Armstrong, but the little one's the girl for my money. She's got more gumption than half the men I know; and as for pluck—ha! you don't know anything about it. By Jove, sir, *there's* a girl for a soldier's wife; and I know one soldier that's going for her."

Armstrong looked up with grave rebuke.

"I hardly think, Colonel St. Aure," he said, "that it is proper to speak so familiarly of any young lady."

Jim grinned.

"Oh, Nettie and I are old friends. You missed all that, out at the Fort, when you were fooling round Standing Bear's camp, risking your scalp like a romantic idiot. We were as thick as pickpockets; and Elsie—I mean Mrs. St. Aure—cottoned to her like a sister. She's a good creature, is my brother's wife. She tells me that she knew Net was coming here, and never let on to Bertie about it. I won't ask you to congratulate me yet, old fellow, but I think I will to-morrow. You can take your heiress, if you can get her; but *I'm* going for Nettie."

Armstrong stared in blank amazement at his companion, usually so reserved. He had never before heard Jim St. Aure speak in such a strain. Like his brother, Jim was rarely given to talking about women at all, and never save in terms of the utmost respect; and yet here he was, speaking familiarly about one toward whom Armstrong felt that moment as if she were his only sister. He shut up the book and said drily:

"Well, if I *have* to congratulate you to-morrow, I hope you won't be as confidential to all the world as you are to me. I hardly think it sounds in good taste about a young lady for whom I cherish the most profound respect, and who is *my friend.*"

Jim grinned again.

"Oh, she's no more your friend than any other young officer's. She's a jolly little girl, Frank; but, I say, she can flirt like sixty. There was old Burke raving about her, and I believe she turned poor Darcy's head, so he got killed in despair. I guess I can tame her, though. She wants a steady old fellow like me to bring her down, for she's pretty skittish, I own. What's the matter, old fellow?"

Armstrong turned abruptly away.

"I won't talk that sort of stuff, Jim; it's profanation," he said angrily. "You forget she's in the house now."

Jim shrugged his shoulders.

"Suppose she is: so much the better for me. I've got a four months' leave—just about time to get the honeymoon over."

"I'd wait till you're sure of your game before you brag so much," retorted Armstrong testily; and then they heard steps in the passage, and in came Madam Lacy, fresh and crisp, like the day, the model of a sharp, energetic old lady, followed by the Judge and Van Dyck, with Juliet Brinton sweeping after them in stately grace.

"Oh, Aunt Isabel, I'm so glad you've come," Juliet was saying. "You don't know how the responsibility has been weighing on my shoulders. Ah, Cornelius, here are some old friends of yours. You've not forgotten them, I suppose, if you *have* resigned. Why, Colonel St. Aure, you've been wonderfully quick at dressing. You're to take *me down* to dinner, by the by. Mr. Armstrong, you will

please escort a young lady who is staying here. She will be down presently."

Armstrong had the advantage of being warned beforehand, so that he was not surprised by the entrance of Van Dyck, and the lessening light of the room prevented his seeing the expression of the faces of either of the other men; but he heard Jim St. Aure say, carelessly:

"Ah, how d'ye do, Van Dyck? Didn't know you were visiting our friends here. How have you been?

To which Cornelius responded in a subdued manner, very unlike his usual tone:

"Pretty well, thank you."

Then Armstrong stood aside himself, and saw that Cornelius had retreated to another part of the room, where he was looking out of the window into the fast gathering darkness. At that moment, and remembering the night before, Armstrong felt a positive thrill of pity come over him for his former comrade. He forgot his rivalry and shabby treatment, and only remembered that they had served in the same company—a bond of union closer than civilians imagine. He walked over quietly to where Van Dyck was standing, and held out his hand, saying, in a low tone:

"Van Dyck, old fellow, forgive and forget. On my soul, I never would have come here if I'd known it would be so awkward for you. The General's here, too."

Van Dyck listened silently, with no apparent emotion. Then he said, in a low, dull tone:

"It's no matter now. I must wait here. I hope *you're* satisfied."

Armstrong drew back. He saw that his companion was gloomy and did not wish to speak, so he forbore to press his company.

Then the servant entered and began to light the wax candles in the chandeliers, for Judge Brinton was an old-

fashioned man in luxuries. The room was soon lighted up, and every one was revealed, so that Armstrong could do no less than go up to salute Madam Lacy. He did so rather timidly, as if he expected an old-time rebuff; but, to his surprise, the lady received him with a cordiality that no one knew better how to assume, and that was perfectly charming.

"Mr. Armstrong," said Madam Lacy, actually rising from her armchair to offer her hand, "you are one of the few men I like to see nowadays. I read all about it in the *Tabard*, sir. You *deserved* promotion, if you did not get it; and my poor dead brother Augustus used to say that promotion in our army was like kissing—it went by favor."

To say that Armstrong was flattered is not enough. He had hated Madam Lacy as much as any conceited youngster could hate an old woman who had very rudely snubbed him in former times, and he was disposed to be as cold to her as he could possibly be; and yet, under the genial influence of the once celebrated "Lacy manner," all his prejudice and anger vanished like snow in summer, and he felt ready that moment to swear that Miss Lacy was the most beautiful old lady, and the most perfect, that he had ever met. He was, in fact, as good an exemplification of the proletarian subdued by the aristocrat as it is easy to imagine.

And yet Madam Lacy did not mean much of what she said. She had determined, for reasons best known to herself, to be kind to the young man, and she came down on him with "the Lacy manner." It is a manner not uncommon among old families in Europe, but only seen in a very few instances in America; for the combination of good blood and long-continued wealth is of the rarest in this favored country, especially in what is denominated "society" in some cities that shall be nameless. However, Madam Lacy had it, and her family had it, and

it once used to serve them very well, when they were in politics and the constituencies were small; but since their wealth had sunk to mediocrity, and the Lacys had abandoned politics, the "manner" was no longer so effective, save on callow fledglings like our young sub.

He blushed and stammered under the old lady's praise, as he never had done under her censure, and finally said that "he was glad to have received Miss Lacy's praise for his small deserts."

The old lady nodded her head and smiled as if immensely pleased, and then said:

"I suppose you've not heard that my niece was quite ill at Marengo?"

"No!" exclaimed Armstrong, in a tone of anxiety. "No one told me a word. Mrs. St. Aure——"

"Oh, never mind. She did quite right," said Miss Lacy, decidedly. "I'm glad the report did not get abroad, but I fear the child was frightened by some silly report about a disaster to her cousin Cornelius, and what with the change of climate and habits at the fort, she had quite a dangerous fever. I had to take her travelling at the South awhile, when we left. You'll find her somewhat changed in looks. We had to cut off her hair, poor child."

Armstrong listened in silence, with a strange fluttering feeling at his heart. He had taken a seat by the old lady, and Juliet was at the other end of the room engaged in a very earnest talk with Jim St. Aure, on whom she was using her dark blue eyes with the most dangerous glances. Something stirred in the young man's heart to a sentiment very like repulsion as he looked.

"She looks at him just as she looked at me," he thought.

Madam Lacy observed the direction of his eyes.

"I suppose you've heard of the engagement?" said the old lady, confidentially.

Armstrong started.

"No! What engagement?"

Miss Lacy looked confused.

"Oh, I beg pardon, but you seem like an old friend to us here. Yes, it's a match at last. That was the reason Cornelius resigned from the army. The Judge insisted on it. They are to be married in February. You know the two estates are side by side, so that the children will be very handsomely dowered. Ah, here comes Nettie, I think. No—why, who is this? I didn't know——"

And the Lacy manner fell from the old lady like a mask, leaving her decidedly ill-tempered, as a little, shy, bashful girl, dressed in mourning, and having a face as dark as an Indian's, glided timidly into the room, and then shrank back as if ready to run away.

Judge Brinton, who had been unusually silent and fidgetty all the evening, leaving the task of entertaining his guests to his daughter, here started up and hurried over to the shy little stranger, to whom he addressed some soothing words, and then brought her straight over to Miss Lacy, with a manner strongly suggestive of apprehension.

"My dear Isabel," he said hurriedly, "permit me to introduce our little friend and neighbor, Miss Mac Diarmid. She speaks hardly any English, and is shy in consequence, having been educated in a French convent. Mademoiselle Eulalie, Madam Lacy."

The poor little half-breed, quailing under the cold gray eyes of Madam Lacy, stammered out her "*Je vous souhait la bonne santé, madame,*" and then turned scarlet with confusion.

Madam Lacy, who found herself compelled to be polite before company, gave one warning glance at her brother-in-law, before which he looked half sulky and half apologetic, and then turned to Eulalie with all the grandeur of the *other* Lacy manner, the overpowering one.

Armstrong, whose French was only Academic, could

not understand the conversation that followed, which was really a cross-questioning on the part of the old lady, under which poor Eulalie blushed and paled again, becoming more bashful every moment. He looked with much interest on this little girl, whom he recognized at once as his friend's sister, and he wondered at what had induced the Judge to introduce such an equivocal visitor into the house; for Armstrong, in spite of the kindness he had received from Mac Diarmid, could not help feeling some of the race-prejudice in regard to half-breeds. His short sojourn in the West had intensified this feeling, so that he was actually beginning to be ashamed that he had ever been under obligations to Mac Diarmid. And yet the half-breed had been his true and generous friend in the days of his poverty, and his only crime was in fighting and scheming for his mother's race. All these thoughts chased each other through Armstrong's mind, and then he threw them off as the quiet of the room was disturbed by the late entry of the General and Mrs. St. Aure, closely followed by Nettie Dashwood.

The feeling that made Armstrong jump up and hurry across the room to meet Nettie, holding out both hands, was that of ardent friendship, only intensified by the interest he had felt since he had heard of her illness. Of this he felt sure, and it was in the manner of a very dear friend that he seized both her hands and spoke so low and earnestly:

"My dear, *dear* Miss Dashwood, I am *so* glad to see you."

Very friendly words, but it was hardly necessary even for a dear friend to hold both her hands so long and look at her so closely. Nettie seemed to think so herself, for she pulled away her hands with a sudden pettish motion, not looking in his face, and coldly said:

"Good *evening*, Mr. Armstrong."

Then, without a change of color, she walked over to her aunt and sat quietly down, leaving the young man decidedly mortified and surprised. She had not even welcomed him. He felt very much as if some one had thrown a large bucket of very cold water all over him, and remained staring stupidly at the girl. He did not notice Madam Lacy's face. The old lady, with one eye on her bashful little *ingénue*, had yet found leisure to watch the meeting, and Eulalie was amazed to see her interlocutor laughing softly to herself, while she put out her soft white hand to Nettie and gave her a little squeeze. Then, under the influence of her good humor, Madam Lacy changed her manner to Eulalie entirely, and chatted away in such a familiar fashion that the poor child unfolded like a spring flower in warm weather, and wondered how she could have ever thought this dear old lady to be cold and haughty.

In the mean time Armstrong recovered his balance, and had time to notice the behavior of the St. Aures to Cornelius, when the inevitable moment of presentation came. It was perfect. No one could have guessed that Cornelius had been other than a stranger, for St. Aure's manner was perfectly cool and gentlemanly, though he did not engage in much conversation. What he did say, had reference wholly to civil topics, the weather, the scenery around The Beeches, the pictures in the room, and such things; and he managed to draw in the whole party, so as to make the conversation general.

Then at last came the summons to dinner, and here Armstrong had hoped to get a little chance to speak to his old friend Nettie and ask her what was the matter. But no. All the arrangements were made by Madam Lacy, who on a sudden assumed her old position as mistress of the house, completely ignoring Juliet, who sank at once to second place.

Judge Brinton and Mrs. St. Aure, the General and

Madam Lacy, Jim St. Aure and Juliet Brinton, Cornelius and Nettie Dashwood were the party; and Armstrong, chafing against his fate, was quietly put off upon the timid little "squaw," as he had already called her in his mind, and seated in a place where he could not speak a word to either Nettie or Juliet.

On one side of him was Eulalie, on the other Mrs. St. Aure, while Jim St. Aure was in clover, opposite, between the two prettiest girls in the room, and Nettie was talking with a manner of perfect cordiality alternately to Jim and to Cornelius Van Dyck.

Armstrong forgot his manners that evening. As a gentleman, he was decidedly bound to do his best to entertain his timid little partner; and there is no doubt that the effort would have improved his French, but as it was, he shamefully neglected her, and poor Eulalie, who had been inclined to be pleased with her handsome partner's looks, soon made up her mind that she did not like this grand society, and that the American gentlemen were —oh, *so* stupid! However, as a relief, she fell in love with Mrs. St. Aure forthwith—a matter not to be wondered at, as every one who saw that gentle lady was apt to fall down and worship her as a sort of goddess.

Van Dyck behaved better than Armstrong had ever seen him do. The young officer watched him narrowly, and could not detect a trace of the old sullen discourtesy that had marked Cornelius. He was quiet and thoughtful, but he seemed to be speaking to Nettie Dashwood in an amicable way, and although Armstrong knew they had once been sworn foes, it seemed now as if they were warm friends. Nettie, too, was much changed. She did not look like the same girl. Her face was rounded into a gentle oval, there was a delicate bloom on her cheek, and her light hair curled in the most bewitching little ringlets over her head, coming down to the neck and giving her an infantile beauty that

was very taking to the eye. Juliet looked Juno-like as ever, but rather heavy and clumsy beside this little Titania, so that for the first time in Armstrong's life it flashed on him that Nettie's beauty was of a higher order than that of her grandly moulded cousin. Then there was a gentle, pensive air about the little girl, so markedly different from her old nervous, jerky movements, that Armstrong caught himself thinking "how much she has improved—the little darling!"

When he had got that far, dinner was half over, and he had not said more than three words to his dusky companion. He suddenly remembered himself, and began to be civil, which he found a hard task, the more so as his French served him but little. However, he persevered, and was rewarded by finding his little partner full of interest as soon as she found that he had known her brother at the Academy, and pouring out a flood of questions in French which put him to his memory to answer.

Then, just as dessert was coming on the table, he happened to look up, and caught for a moment the eye of Nettie Dashwood. It was unmistakably angry, and gave an old-time flash, but the look was averted in a moment, and the young fellow saw it no more, though it set him to thinking.

At last the ladies went up stairs, and General St. Aure with them; for he neither drank wine nor smoked. Jim lighted his cigar, and the Judge and Cornelius passed the bottle.

Then it was that Armstrong made up his mind to have an explanation at any cost, and he hurriedly excused himself on the plea of wishing to join the ladies. As he was going out, the servant came in with a card to Van Dyck, which the latter no sooner saw than he said:

"Show the gentlemen into the green parlor, Tom. *I'll be* there. Uncle Joseph, I suppose you've no objec-

tion. It's some private business. Two friends of mine. They are stopping at the hotel. Excuse me a minute."

Then he was gone. Armstrong, as he passed the green parlor—a little side room used for business interviews—noticed the same red-bearded stranger he had seen with Mac Diarmid at the billiard saloon, and with him was Captain Burke of his own regiment. Then he understood.

"So the poor fellow isn't white feather, after all," he muttered as he entered the drawing-room.

There was Nettie Dashwood with the General and Mrs. St. Aure, Miss Lacy completing the party; and all had settled to a game of whist, something which he had heard Nettie say she detested. Then the young man groaned in spirit, and turned on Juliet Brinton, who was conversing earnestly in French with Eulalie Mac Diarmid. Six months ago he would have jumped at the chance of the conversation in which he now engaged with distinguished ability. He had loved Juliet Brinton with all the ardor of a young man's first infatuation in those days, and she was still as beautiful as ever; and yet, such are the inexplicable changes of the human heart, that Frank Armstrong, in less than half an hour, during which Juliet had treated him to her most confidential and syren-like glances, actually caught himself smothering a yawn and glancing over at Nettie Dashwood.

"Two by honors and three tricks, make us out," remarked that young lady quietly; and then she cast a careless glance over her shoulder at Armstrong, before which that puzzled youth flushed with mingled anger and amazement. Nettie had favored him with a look of contempt, pure and simple, and he felt outraged.

"What the deuce have I done to deserve this from *her*?" he muttered, just as the Judge and Jim St. Aure

entered the drawing-room, followed by Van Dyck, who looked pale and worried.

Armstrong felt that moment that he was being treated very shabbily, and it must be confessed that he had reason for his belief. Nothing he did seemed to please Miss Nettie. If he spoke to her, she favored him with the briefest and coldest of answers, but if he went to anybody else and began to make himself agreeable, he was sure to catch one of those glances, angry or scornful, which had already puzzled him so much. He turned for relief to Miss Lacy, and found that old lady full of gracious condescension, but somehow she managed to bring in Juliet's engagement and such like exasperating topics before she had said fifty words, so that Armstrong felt as thoroughly miserable before the evening was over as any conceited young man could wish to feel. What the trouble was all about he could not tell, but this he knew, that he was resolved to have an explanation with Nettie Dashwood before he left that house; and so thinking he went to bed to dream of her all night.

As for Nettie, she was full of cordiality toward every one else, but that she was playing a part appears probable from a remark addressed to her by Miss Lacy as they parted for the night; for the old lady kissed her niece affectionately, and said:

"My dear, I'm proud of you. You're a true Lacy, and he deserves his punishment."

CHAPTER XXIX.

BUSINESS AFFAIRS.

"JOSEPH," said Miss Lacy, severely, "I think that it is about time—if, indeed, you have not resolved to disgrace the family *entirely*—that I received an explanation of your singular conduct in asking ME to receive that girl. Possibly you have the intention of marrying her, and expect ME to sanction it. If that is the case, I wish you distinctly to understand that I shall leave the house at once, and take with me *my income*, which you may or may not miss."

And the old lady, having relieved her mind, folded her hands virtuously on her lap, and gazed at her brother-in-law with freezing dignity. They were in the Judge's sanctum sanctorum, where in former days the Judge had worked up those elaborate and ponderous opinions, which had gained him the title of the "Nestor of the Bench." Since his retirement, it had served as the depository of all his private papers, and was distinguished by those mysterious interviews with stock brokers, from which the Judge emerged by turns a winner and loser. He never acknowledged the extent of his transactions either way, but as his name appeared on the list of directors in several railroads, it was surmised that the Judge was a pretty heavy dealer in stocks.

It was one peculiarity of Judge Brinton that, however pompous to the world outside, he was always deferential, even to humility, to his energetic sister-in-law. He had only broken away from her commands on one occasion, in

reference to Armstrong and Van Dyck, and he had supped sorrow for that rash disobedience ever since, till he was able to announce to Madam Lacy that Juliet was definitely engaged to her cousin, an event which had occurred only a few weeks before. Since that time a transformation had occurred in several personages of the family. Cornelius had become civil to Nettie Dashwood, and she had treated him with uniform kindness, while Madam Lacy had become amiable to all mankind. It was probably this amiability, reflected in her letters, and added to the fact of her absence, that had emboldened the Judge to the step that was now drawing down on him the scathing remarks of the old lady.

The Judge looked both anxious and apologetic. Madam Lacy's income, to which she had referred, was indeed a great comfort in that profuse household, where the Judge lately seemed to be always pinched for ready money. So he began, nervously:

"My dear sister, you are entirely mistaken, I assure you. The fact is, I have a little—well—a little business transaction pending with this Mac Diarmid family, which compels me to be civil to them for a time. If you would only trust to me——"

"It's very well to say 'trust to me,' Joseph," said Miss Lacy, without abating her severity. "But I should like to know exactly what are these little business transactions of which you speak."

The Judge lowered his voice.

"Well, the fact is, Isabel, I am pretty heavily loaded down with a certain stock, which I think I can sell to this Mac Diarmid, so as to avoid a loss. These half-breeds are always simple fellows in money matters, and he has half made up his mind to buy. If we can only keep him *amused* by a little politeness to his sister, I think we may *catch* him yet. His father left him a great deal of money."

Miss Lacy looked severely doubtful.

"I don't think you'll get him," she said. "And if you do, you'll find it hard to shake him off. That girl will keep coming to the house, and won't be denied. When is this wonderful scheme of yours to be consummated?"

The Judge brightened up.

"Well, the fact is, my dear sister, I expect the young man here every minute, and he may conclude this morning. There's a ring at the bell, now. If you'll wait, it may be he. I should like you to see him. Where are the St. Aures?"

"Somewhere about the house," said the old lady, suspiciously. "What have *they* got to do with this young man?"

"Oh, nothing—only he has expressed a strong desire to meet the General, and I have promised to introduce him."

"Humph!" said Miss Lacy. "It seems you're bent on identifying this young man with yourself."

"Only for a time, Isabel; only for a time. It's easy to drop him afterward."

"Joseph," said Miss Lacy, drily, "it requires a great deal of *savoir faire* to drop an objectionable person, after he has once been installed as a visitor. The Lacys might do it. We shall see whether *your* race is equal to the task. Here comes the young man. I suppose you don't expect me to stay here."

"No, no—only to be introduced," said the Judge, hastily. "Keep the St. Aures till we come. We'll not be long."

The next minute there was a knock at the door, and the servant ushered in Mac Diarmid, in the same elaborate but rather sporting toilet which he had worn when he caned Van Dyck in the billiard room. Miss Lacy took him all in with a single swift glance, and her bow was the perfection of cool politeness as the Judge introduced her to the half-

breed. Then she vanished, more than ever convinced that Joseph was going to be taken in.

"I don't believe," said the old lady to herself, "that he has got the money Joseph thinks, and he's certainly not a gentleman, whatever his father's blood may be. I don't believe a word of it."

When she was gone, the Judge at once became confidential.

"Well, Mr. Mac Diarmid," said he, rubbing his hands, "so you have made the inquiries at the company's office in the city? You found things all right, eh?"

"Yes," said Mac Diarmid, quietly. "They told me that the last quarterly dividend was six per cent."

"Aha! Well, you know I told you it was a first-class investment. You remember?"

"Yes, I remember," answered the half-breed, with the same quiet voice. "But I don't quite see why you should be willing to sell such a stock."

The Judge smiled in his most benignant style.

"Well, the fact is, my young friend, I like you and I like your little sister, and my daughter likes you both; and—it was, in fact, at *her* suggestion that I determined to sell to you. I am getting too old to attend to stocks, which require constant watching to make them yield handsome dividends, and I know of no man to whom I could commit them with a better prospect of their proving a bonanza in his hands."

Mac Diarmid looked into the Judge's eyes with his steady, piercing glance.

"Very well, Judge," he said. "I am a man of few words, when I have made up my mind. I think I shall take the stock, but I shall require till to-morrow to get the money. If agreeable to you, I will make you a written reply to-morrow. That's business. And now for those *friends* of yours. Are they here?"

The Judge looked immensely relieved. He had expected more trouble.

"Certainly, my dear sir, they are here. You would like to see them, I suppose."

"I should. I am quite anxious to see this General St. Aure, of whom I have heard so much."

The Judge rose, but lingered a moment.

"It is understood, then, that we transfer to-morrow. Where shall it be? At the office in the city?"

"As you please," said Mac Diarmid, carelessly. "I will be there at three, or write to you. In any event we shall finish all our business to-morrow."

He closed with a peculiar intonation in his voice, which the Judge, absorbed in his ideas of gain, did not notice, the more so as he was opening the door.

"Come along, Mac Diarmid, my boy," he said, in a hearty, jolly way, very unlike his usual bland dignity. "You shall see the great Indian fighter, and I hope you'll not think the worse of us for having him for a friend."

And the Judge chuckled amiably.

Mac Diarmid made no reply, but followed his host, with a peculiar smile on his dark face, till they entered the drawing room, where they found the whole party of the night before, trifling away the early morning hours after breakfast, before the serious pleasures of the day commenced. The tall and undeniably handsome villain was introduced successively to each person, even to Van Dyck, and displayed no symptoms of recognition to any save Armstrong. When he met General St. Aure, who was the last, he held his hand for several seconds, looking earnestly at the General, as if much interested, then said:

"I am very glad I have seen you at last, General. I have heard a great deal of you in former times, at the Academy. Every one remembered 'Pug.'"

The General laughed in his good-natured way.

"They always talk that sort of nonsense about lucky comrades. I fear I was a scapegrace. It's a pity you never graduated, my dear sir. You would have made a fine soldier. If I were you, it seems to me I'd try the army still. We want active young officers badly."

Mac Diarmid smiled in his peculiar enigmatical manner, as he said:

"I don't fear but that I shall make a soldier yet, General, some day. I suppose you have a long leave?"

"Yes," said St. Aure, his face lighting up. "Three months to run loose, and I can tell you I enjoy it."

Then Mac Diarmid bowed and drew back, for a servant came to the door saying:

"Sleigh all ready, sir."

"You will excuse me, Mr. Mac Diarmid," said the General in his offhand manner. "We are engaged this morning, most of us, on a sleigh-ride. Hope to see you again, sir."

And then there was a bustle in the room, as the people began to collect their wraps.

Miss Lacy had evidently had the ordering of this party, for the old lady began to bustle about, in and out of the room, ordering and directing, while Mac Diarmid stood back and watched the rest.

In the large two-horse sleigh at the door, it was arranged that General and Mrs. St. Aure, together with Colonel Jim and Miss Nettie Dashwood, were to go out, on the Albany post road and across the river, for a long and famous drive, while Juliet Brinton and the little Mac Diarmid girl were to be taken in another sleigh to the old Van Amstel Manor House to carry Eulalie home, with Cornelius to drive them. This was Miss Lacy's pet arrangement, made the night before, and on which she had insisted *that* very morning before she began her discussion with *the Judge*. Eulalie had consented in great relief, for she

was mortally afraid of Miss Lacy, and anxious to get home.

At the last moment, however, Cornelius, who had not been consulted in the matter, put in an objection, in a strange, constrained voice, and glancing covertly at Mac Diarmid.

"I'm sorry, aunt, that you didn't tell me this last night. The fact is I have an engagement this morning with some friends who are stopping at the village hotel. I fear I can't drive over there and get back in time."

Miss Lacy looked astonished and offended.

"Well, Cornelius, I must say——" she began, when Mac Diarmid interfered.

"If you will pardon me, madam," he said, deferentially, "I can suggest a better plan. I can drive over my sister myself, and we need not trouble Miss Brinton."

"That would be the very thing," said Miss Lacy decidedly. "You have a cutter here, I believe."

But then came a fresh complication; for Juliet Brinton suddenly turned restive.

"I don't think it would do at all," she said. "I should lose my ride entirely, and so would Mr. Armstrong. The best thing I can see is that Mr. Armstrong should drive Miss Mac Diarmid, while I go with Mr. Mac Diarmid; and then Mr. Armstrong can bring me back. That's perfect."

Miss Lacy looked grave, and said drily:

"I think it is only due to some one else, Juliet, that you should ask *his* permission."

And she looked straight at Van Dyck, who was standing awkwardly by, without taking any part in the discussion. It was the first public reference Miss Lacy had made to the engagement which had been planned so long. Juliet immediately crimsoned indignantly, and retorted with more spirit than she had ever before shown in public.

"I ask permission of no one, *yet*, aunt."

Then she swept from the room, whence the St. Aure party had already gone; and Madam Lacy, for the first time in her experience at the Beeches, found herself defied and set at naught by the innocent and meek Juliet. However, there was no resource: Mac Diarmid had already followed the daughter of the house; and Frank Armstrong, looking as gloomy as any well-behaved young man could be expected to do, was offering his arm to Eulalie. Poor Frank felt thoroughly disheartened ever since his conversation with that veteran of society, Miss Lacy, the night before. He knew that Juliet was at last definitely engaged to Van Dyck, and yet somehow he did not feel as acutely miserable over the fact as he thought he should have felt, had he dreamed of it when he was coming up in the cars. He tried to reason himself into a cynical mood over the faithlessness of woman, but the more he reflected, the more he remembered that Juliet had never given him any explicit promise. She had accepted his homage and lured him on with any quantity of looks and sighs, but with no tangible words had she ever pretended to love him as he did her.

And yet he felt profoundly miserable, though from a different cause. He had not yet been able to speak to Nettie alone, and he was certain that he felt the pangs of wounded friendship. He was innocent of evil toward her, and yet it was very provoking that their friendship should be broken up without cause. Besides this, he began to feel decidedly jealous of Jim St. Aure, who seemed to have entirely supplanted him in his old, familiarly friendly relations with Nettie. To be condemned to a long drive under these circumstances with a little swarthy girl who could only speak French or a few words of English, was decidedly annoying, and he had a hard struggle to be civil, *though* he managed it.

Madam Lacy ruffled all her plumes with an air of offended dignity as the last couple went out of the door, and then turned on Cornelius with the bitter remark:

"Well, sir, if young men were what they were when I was a girl, *you* would be the laughing stock of this county. As for you, Joseph, I hope you'll never be sorry for this morning's work."

So saying, the old lady swept from the room, and retired to her own chamber in dudgeon.

Cornelius never noticed her remark, except by a faint sad smile, and almost immediately after, left the house for the village. Before he went, however, he handed the Judge a small package, saying:

"Will you be kind enough to lock that up in the safe, sir? I may have to go to the city this afternoon, and not be back for some time. It contains directions about my rents, if you'll be kind enough to receive them for me, if I'm not back in three days."

"Certainly, Con, certainly," said the old gentleman unsuspiciously. "I suppose you'll be back in time for the wedding—eh, sir?" and the Judge chuckled at his own wit.

"I hope so, sir," said Cornelius, without relaxing from his gloom; and then he too was gone, and the Beeches left solitary.

He walked slowly down to the little village tavern, where he was met by Captain Burke, who at once took him up stairs to a private parlor.

"It's all settled, me boy," said the honest Captain, in his heartiest manner. "Ye're to meet the other gintleman in a nice place in the woods, which Mr. Evan Mac Diarmid has shown me. It's the sweetest spot for a quiet little game of this kind ye ever saw. The other party, I must say, behaved like a gintleman, and gave us the choice of weapons; so I chose the same that the O'Grady always

used—the good ould-fashioned sawhandle*—more power to that same!"

"All right," said Cornelius listlessly. "When is it to be?" He was thoroughly dispirited.

"This afternoon, just about sunset. It's a nice time, because these country fellows will be goin' home on the roads, and we'll not be disturbed in the woods."

"And suppose the affair terminates fatally," said Cornelius in a low tone. "What have you done for the safety of the survivor?"

"He drives to Hudson, and takes the through express to Canada," said Burke.

* The Captain probably referred to the sawhandled dueling-pistol, the favorite weapon of his ancestry.

CHAPTER XXX.

A SLEIGH-RIDE.

WHEN Armstrong had helped his swarthy little damsel into the cutter and had fairly started, the other sleighs were already out of sight round the hedge by the gate of the Beeches. He felt decidedly ill-tempered, and struck his horse angrily with the whip, sending him "all abroad" at once; and thus gained an excuse for not talking much to his companion, while he was scolding the animal. He drove rapidly through the village, catching sight of Mac Diarmid's cutter going round another corner, and again whipped up to try and catch his old comrade. Again, however, his beast "broke up," and refused to trot squarely except at a moderate pace; so that, after several contests of the sort, Armstrong was compelled to give up the idea of overtaking Juliet, except by going at full gallop, a thing opposed to all sleighing traditions.

Then he felt more sulky than ever, for if there is one thing an ambitious and conceited young man hates more than another, it is to be outdone by one of his own age. So he mentally cursed the Judge's taste in horses, and longed for a fast trotter, as they jogged along, rapidly enough for most people, but not half fast enough for this impetuous youth. However, even with a "family horse," a drive of five miles is not very long; and Armstrong well remembered the road to old Brinton Manor, which he had taken the summer before, on that memorable day when Nettie Dashwood had served him so faithfully and obtained him his coveted opportunity. As he looked back over

those few months, an eternity of time seemed to have passed, and he wondered to himself how it was that Juliet, who had then displayed so much favor to him, could have deliberately abandoned him for the cousin that Nettie had told him she hated.

"There's a mystery there," muttered the young man, as he thought of it. "Either Nettie fooled me, or *she* did."

Then he colored a little, as he caught the eyes of Eulalie Mac Diarmid fixed on him, and he muttered an excuse for talking to himself.

At last his weary drive was over, and it was with a profound feeling of relief that he drove up in front of the old Manor-House, and left his charge at the door.

Eulalie, on her part, was equally relieved to get away from her gloomy escort, and it was in the faintest of voices that she said:

"Veel you not coom een, sare?"

"Thank you, no," said Armstrong, briefly. "I see Miss Brinton has not arrived. I'll drive around a little, and perhaps meet her."

"Ver' vell," said Eulalie, briskly. "*Bon jour, monsieur.*"

And the little half-breed was into the house in a moment, for fear her escort might change his mind.

And then happened a strange thing. No sooner was the door fairly closed than Eulalie began to dance about and make faces at the retiring cavalier through the window, while she cried ecstatically to Baptiste:

"Eh, my friend, he is fool, that one. I laugh at him. It is the same man that my brother saved from death, and he dares to rival him. Oh, that I am happy! It is too gloomy with these great people. I go no more. We are all going away, Baptiste. Knowest thou, old man? We are *going to* the beautiful France that thou speakest of so often."

Then old Baptiste lifted up his hands and cried:

"*Grace à Dieu!* That I am happy!"

In the mean time Armstrong drove once or twice round the grounds of the old Manor-House, seeing no signs of the other cutter, and at last concluded that his two friends must be taking a circuit to occupy time.

"I don't wonder," he growled to himself, as he started his horse on the back road. "She's enough to coax any man into a long ride, but that's all the good it will do poor Mac. She's a deceiving syren, and there's no more honor in her than Lucretia Borgia. It serves Mac right for his abominable conduct to the government. I hope she'll get him as much in love as I was, then he'll suffer when she marries Van Dyck. I wonder where they've gone, any way?"

He drove out to the main road and there began to exercise his skill in trailing to find the tracks of Mac Diarmid's cutter, but it was all in vain. There were so many prints that it was impossible to tell which was which, and Armstrong gave up the attempt and drove out to the open country, to take a long view and descry the truants if he could. He soon came to the place where the view stretched out to the village of Scrabbleville, and eagerly scanned the country. Sure enough, there were plenty of sleighs and cutters, skimming about over the roads; and Armstrong thought he recognized the gray horse with which Mac Diarmid had started. So he whipped up the Judge's lazy nag, and drove on to catch the stranger if he could. This time he was angry enough to be careless of appearances, and made no bones of galloping full speed through the quiet street of Scrabbleville, in chase of the gray horse. It cost him a good three-mile chase before he got near enough to the cutter to distinguish that it contained a gray-headed farmer and a boy, when he turned back in considerable disgust, to find that in his eagerness he had missed the

road and was in a strange place. By that time it was nearly one o'clock, and he had no resource but to follow the trail of his own runners back to the village, which he reached with a smoking horse, looking pretty well blown. Then he determined to go back once more to the Manor-House, for surely Juliet must have got there by this time, and he began to picture to himself at least a pleasant drive home. But now the Brinton horse began to flag, and it was fully an hour more before Armstrong drove into the lonely by-road that led to the Manor-House. Here, however, his trailing was of some use, for he saw in the snow that no other vehicle but his own had gone up the lane that day, though he recognized the track of a cutter coming out—the same which he had noticed at first.

"Never mind," he thought. "There's some back way. I'll drive up to the house and inquire."

He drove up, and the grounds were all as silent and deserted as ever. No sign of the master was visible. With a certain feeling of alarm, Armstrong pulled up and ran up the steps to the old-fashioned knocker, which he plied with great vigor, the strokes thundering through the silent house with a peculiar echo.

There was no answer.

Again and again he tried, and then went round to the kitchen windows, which were near the ground, and looked in.

The kitchen was silent and empty, even of furniture.

Then, thoroughly alarmed, the young man set out on a regular tour of observation all over the place, which ended in his coming to the conclusion that the Mac Diarmids had fled, bag and baggage. The marks of broad runners in the barnyard showed where large furniture sleighs had been backed up, and then Armstrong perceived that, as he had suspected, there was a back road.

He had no longer any doubt that Mac Diarmid had

carried away Juliet, whether willingly or unwillingly he could not say, but he determined to do his best to find out. He came back to his sleigh and drove off on the tracks of the broad runners, till he found them going into the Albany post-road toward Hudson. Then he suddenly remembered the state of his horse, and reflected that after all, could he catch the fugitives, he had no authority to stop them. Reluctantly he dropped the trail, which he had followed four or five miles to the post-road, and turned back home, when it was half past four and the sun low in the sky. He threw the reins on the neck of the Judge's lazy nag, which at once started off at a fair pace for home, and then he realized for the first time that he could not possibly get there till after dark, for he was at least ten miles from the Beeches.

"Never mind," thought the young man resignedly. "I've worried enough over it, and now I'm going to take it coolly. It's no use fighting the inevitable."

So he jogged steadily along the road behind the lazy nag, revolving in his mind all the strange events that had accompanied his acquaintance with Juliet. Here she was, run away, to all seeming, with his old chum of the Academy, and yet his heart beat as calmly as ever. Truly, his summer's experience, change of scene, and ambition, had killed the lovesick visions indulged in by the cadet of eight months before. He had come out into the light of life, and things proved different from what they once seemed.

As he was revolving all these thoughts the sun set and found him still far from Brintonville, in the middle of a large wood. Suddenly he heard, ahead of him, two sharp, light reports, far away in the distance. Armstrong wondered what they could be. It was shooting time, but the reports were too light for those of guns. They were more like pistols. He dealt his lazy nag a cut with the whip, and hastened forward at a slightly better pace till the wood

was nearly passed, and with it most of the light faded away. The moon was somewhat past the full, so that it had not risen yet, and the way looked gloomy and cheerless enough; but still more cheerless were the reflections of the young man on the probable reception that awaited him at the Beeches, when he came in without Juliet and with such a story as he would have to tell.

At last the wood was left behind, and he began to see distant lights on the river, for he was near the bank by this time, and the lamps were lighted over in Squedunk on the other side. This cheered him up a little, for he knew that Squedunk was opposite to Brintonville, and that he was nearing his destination. Then he heard the rapid jingle of bells behind him, and out of a side road, leading up from the river, dashed a large two-horse sleigh, at a rattling burst of speed, overhauling him rapidly.

Presently it passed him, and he heard the voice of General St. Aure saying: "We'll soon be home now, Elsie."

Instinctively he hailed the sleigh, and Jim St. Aure, who was driving, pulled up.

"Hilloa, Armstrong! What are *you* doing here? I thought you'd have been making hay long ago," cried the incorrigible Jim. "What have you been doing?"

"Nothing to the purpose," said Armstrong hastily. "Hold up, Jim. Don't drive on. Something's happened, and this horse is played out. Miss Brinton's gone off with that Mac Diarmid."

There was a startled cry from the sleigh, and then Armstrong remembered that Nettie was with the St. Aures.

"Juliet! Gone!" echoed the girl. "Where, why, how?"

"Here, Armstrong," called out the General in his sharp tones. "Come into this sleigh. We must hurry into the village. Jim, get out, and bring in the other *sleigh*. No time to be lost."

Armstrong was used to the General's rapid decision. He had seen him in action, watching for a propitious moment and seizing it the instant it came, so he was not flustered by the sudden order. He dropped the reins on his tired beast and jumped out; while Jim, with no less promptitude, was off his box, reins in hand—for his horses were impatient—and ready to make the exchange. In a moment more Armstrong was on the front seat behind the fresh, vigorous horses; and no one who has not experienced the feeling of relief that follows a change from a beaten to a fresh horse can realize his sensations. The double team had gone nearly as far as his single horse, but it had gone rapidly, rested more than once, and had been fed, matters that make a great difference; besides which, the horses were the best the Judge had, while the other brute was his cheapest and poorest.

Once on the way home, Armstrong's spirits began to revive. He felt rather than saw that Nettie was on the box beside him, and it flashed into his mind that he might now get his opportunity to ask an explanation. However, Nettie did not address him, and St. Aure merely said: "Whip up, Armstrong. This is a serious matter. That fellow looked like a fortune-hunter."

Armstrong made no reply, but obeyed his orders, and had the satisfaction of feeling his team flying over the road at a speed of some fourteen miles an hour. Soon the lights of Brintonville hove in sight, and then the dark mass of the Beeches appeared, the house lighted up as if for a party; and Armstrong remembered that a party had been really planned, to celebrate St. Aure's visit.

No one said anything, as they dashed into the grounds and drew up by the step, but a servant was in waiting to open the door, and quietly announced that dinner would be ready in half an hour. "Would the ladies and gentlemen please excuse Madam Lacy, as she was dressing?"

"Where is Judge Brinton?" asked St. Aure in his curt military style.

"The Judge 'ave just come in, sir, and is hup in his room, sir, a dressin', sir."

"Go and knock at his door, and tell him something of importance has happened; that we wish to see him at once," said the soldier with prompt decision. The man, being a thoroughly trained British servant, made no remark, but hurried to obey the order, while St. Aure, with his usual thoughtful frown when engaged in business, led the way to the drawing-room, and placed his wife on a sofa beside Nettie, who was very pale and quiet.

"Take care of the child, Elsie," he said absently. Then he turned to Armstrong. "Now, Mr. Armstrong, collect your thoughts to make a business-like report to the Judge. This is a bad affair, and requires coolness."

A few moments later, down came the Judge, in his evening dress, precise and pompous as ever, but with an undercurrent of anxiety visible in spite of his assumed calmness. As soon as he saw Armstrong, he seemed to realize that something was the matter, for the young man's face was like a funeral sermon. He turned pale and caught hold of a chair.

"What has happened, sir? My daughter——"

"She did not meet me at the Manor, sir," said Armstrong. "Neither she nor Mac Diarmid went there, and where they are now, no one but themselves can tell."

Then the Judge grew very red in the face.

"Impossible! You must be mistaken, sir. Did you ask Miss Mac Diarmid?"

"She has gone too, sir. The house is empty, and the family has moved."

Here St. Aure interposed.

"Permit me, Judge. Mr. Armstrong, make your report, sir, from the time you left this house with Miss Mac

Diarmid. Omit nothing. Judge, you had better sit down."

The Judge, whose face had been gradually paling, obeyed the advice and sank into a large arm-chair. St. Aure deliberately locked all the doors and came back.

"We might as well be quiet while we can," said the practical soldier. "Go on, Armstrong."

Thus encouraged, the young officer told his story amid a dead silence, including his return to the Manor-House and his discovery of its emptiness. When he had finished, St. Aure said:

"This thing was well planned: they never had time to move during your short absence. That house was empty when you took the girl there, for I remember that we met two furniture teams this morning when we drove out. Now, Judge, I suppose you know what to do. Telegraph to the police at——"

Here came a ring at the door bell, and he broke off.

"That's Jim, for a thousand," said General St. Aure, and he went to the street door himself. When it was opened, in walked no less a person than Mark Meagher, at sight of whom St. Aure instantly froze up.

"Mr. Meagher," he said, coldly, "how you have found out this affair, I know not, but you cannot interview any one here."

Mark Meagher smiled, as he said, quietly: "I come to give news, not to take it, General. I want to speak to Judge Brinton. Your brother came with me, but he drove that good-for-nothing brute round to the stables. Mac Diarmid's second has shot your old friend, Van Dyck, who has shown pluck at last."

Then St. Aure's countenance changed, and he quietly led the "special" into the little green parlor, where the business interviews were held.

"Wait here a minute," he said; and he went to fetch

the Judge, to whom he whispered that a person wished to see him on the same business. The Judge, with hanging jaw and a gray paleness on his face, slowly accompanied him, and as he walked, he tottered so that St. Aure had to take his arm to steady him. Once in the green parlor, the "special" locked the door.

"Before I say anything, I require both of you gentlemen to give me your word that you will not divulge anything to any lawyer or law officer. If not, I leave the house," said Mark.

St. Aure and the Judge both assented, and Mark Meagher went on:

"Remember, I swear to nothing, and tell no one how I know this. Your nephew, Judge, was caned in Tommy White's billiard room, the night before last, by a gentleman of the name of Mac Diarmid, whom he challenged. Their affair was to come off in the woods near here at sunset today. Van Dyck and his second were there, but Mac Diarmid did not come. At last his second arrived, and coolly informed Van Dyck that his principal had an engagement with a lady, and that he had come in his place. Van Dyck, I must say, behaved well. He looked as if he had made up his mind to fight, and the end of it was that they exchanged shots, and Van Dyck got it in the arm. He'll be here pretty soon now, and we want the thing kept dark. That's all."

"But how are we to know, Mr. Meagher," said St. Aure, gravely, "that this will not all be in the *Tabard* tomorrow morning? You are a reporter."

Mark Meagher smiled as he said:

"You don't know us newspaper-men, General, if you think we print everything we see and hear. There's such a thing as news that doesn't pay. This is such a case. I know a good many things I don't print. There's the young *fellow* now. He got off easily this time."

As he spoke, there came a ring at the door-bell, and the Judge started up to go into the hall. Mark Meagher detained St. Aure a moment, and whispered in his ear:

"That Mac Diarmid's a half-breed. Did you know it? He was in Standing Bear's camp when I was there."

The General's face fell and he looked perfectly horror-stricken.

"Good God, Mark!" he ejaculated. "He's run away with the Judge's daughter. Which way has he gone?"

The correspondent seemed to take matters much more coolly, for he exhibited no surprise at the intelligence. He merely shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, well, he's rich enough to go to Europe, where his skin won't bar him out. I shouldn't say it was so bad."

General St. Aure looked—for the first time in his life, perhaps—astounded.

"Great heavens, Mark!" he said. "Have you been among Indians, and can talk coolly of such a fiend in human shape? He shall suffer for it."

He turned angrily away and went into the hall, which was full of people by this time, around Van Dyck, who carried his arm in a sling and looked as if he had recovered all his spirits. Madam Lacy was there, the Judge, Jim St. Aure and Burke; and they were all clustered around the new-comer, who was pretending modesty, though it was obvious he felt very proud of his adventure. The Judge hovered on the outside of the group, the picture of nervous agitation.

As soon as General St. Aure made his appearance, Van Dyck started and his face flushed. He went up to the General, and said, in a low tone:

"So you see I am not quite what you thought me, General."

St. Aure, for the first time since he had spoken to Van

Dyck at Marengo, looked kindly and compassionately at the young man.

"My poor fellow," he said, "you don't know the worst yet. Your enemy has revenged himself——"

"Yes," interrupted Van Dyck, vauntingly, "by running—the cowardly dog!"

St. Aure compressed his lips.

"No," he said; "but by stealing your betrothed, to become the slave of a half-breed Indian."

It was sudden and cruel, but, at the moment, Van Dyck looked so insolent that the other could not refrain from the news. The young man started back.

Then came a sudden cry, for Madam Lacy had caught the words, and turned on the Judge. The proud old lady's eyes flashed fire as she swept down on her brother-in-law and backed him into a corner.

"I told you so, Joseph," she said in a low, fierce whisper; "you *have* found cause to repent scorning my advice."

"What can we do, Isabel?" was all the humiliated old man could stammer in reply.

"Keep it still," said Madam Lacy in the same fierce whisper, her gray-blue eyes gleaming with all the old Lacy fire. "Your daughter has been taken ill—you understand—the party is postponed—the house shut up—are you a fool, Joseph? The thing *must* be kept quiet."

"But the servants," objected the Judge faintly. "They *will* talk. It *must* get out."

Madam Lacy smiled.

"Not when we have money. They know nothing yet except that Juliet has not come home. She has been taken ill at her Aunt Mary's house. You understand. We can trust Mary Lacy. Leave it to me."

And the old lady managed the affair so well that it was soon understood at the Beeches that Miss Juliet had been

taken ill at the house of her aunt, the widow of the late Major Lacy, who lived about five miles off, and that Mr. Armstrong had come home with the news.

The scheme was worthy of the old lady's wits, and explained a great many things to the servants. In the first place it showed why Miss Lacy ordered a sleigh and drove over to her sister-in-law to see the invalid. It explained why the General and Colonel St. Aure were so busy at the telegraph office, a little later, sending messages—probably for doctors. It explained the prostration of the Judge, who nearly had a stroke of apoplexy, and why the running to and fro was all done by the guests, while the servants enjoyed a holiday after putting out the lights and excusing the house to the guests, who began to arrive.

"That old woman's as smart as chain-lightning, Bertie," remarked Jim St. Aure, about three o'clock in the morning, as he met his brother down in the dimly-lighted drawing-room. "She knows whom to trust, and I shouldn't wonder if she threw dust in all the people's eyes."

"Yes, but how about the time when it all comes out, Jim? Suppose we never catch them? Think of the future of that poor girl with that villain."

"Well," quoth Jim, "she needn't have run away with him. He was a deucedly handsome fellow."

The General frowned. With all his generosity, he was a firm believer in the doctrine that Indian blood was an ineradicable stain.

"Jim," he said, sharply, "I am surprised at the cool way in which you speak of this affair. Have you been on the plains all these years, and seen the manner in which women are treated by those fiends in human shape, and yet can talk calmly of the possibility of a refined and intelligent lady, like the daughter of our host, being tied for life to a savage?"

Jim hesitated a moment, for he was really much in awe

of his brother. However, he had something on his mind which induced him to speak out.

"Bertie," he said, "perhaps you don't know that Mac Diarmid has just as good an education as any of us. The fact is, old fellow, I sometimes think that, even on the plains, the Indians would not be as bad as they are, if it were not for the teachings they get from the plainsmen and the fellows who hang around the railway. At all events, this particular one is by no means a savage. I'm far from being convinced that he's not a much better fellow than that Van Dyck. It was a choice for her between the two, you know."

The General contracted his face into one of his peculiar frowns, as he growled out:

"Well, it's no use crying over spilled milk. This is a queer world, Jim."

To which Jim responded: "And you know you often say everything happens for the best. Who knows what people will say of this, a hundred years hence? Well, good night, old fellow."

"Good night, Jim."

And the brothers separated to seek much-needed repose.

CHAPTER XXXI.

COMING HOME.

IT was several weeks before the excitement consequent on Juliet Brinton's real flight and supposed sickness subsided, but the Lacys stuck together as a clan, and the whole matter was hushed up in the most secret manner. It was given out successively that Miss Brinton was worse, was dying, was recovering, and at last had gone travelling with her aunt, Mrs. Lacy, who was one of the "poor Lacys," and kept no servants, but lived with a maiden sister in a cottage on the old Lacy Manor. So there was no one to tell different news from thence. Mark Meagher kept his word, and no whisper of the truth reached the papers, though a full account appeared of a supposed duel, in which "a prominent gentleman moving in fashionable life" had been wounded, causing so much agitation to his betrothed that she had fallen ill when she heard the news, and her life had been despaired of ever since.

The St. Aures left the Beeches, the next day after the escapade, and with them of course went Armstrong, who, to his great disappointment, had not been able to say one word to Nettie Dashwood, and was still ignorant of the cause of her cold treatment of him. He could not do any better, however, as affairs stood. It was obvious that the Brintons expected their guests to leave, and they did so. Armstrong and Van Dyck actually shook hands as they parted, and Cornelius said, in a smothered voice:

"Good-by, Armstrong. We both lost her, so we needn't hate each other any more."

This young man was somewhat improved by his trials and humiliations. The best, almost the only good point of his character, had been his love for his cousin Juliet; and the swift succession of blows that had prostrated him from a vain, selfish, purse-proud youth to the depths of mortification, had done him a certain amount of good. He had found that he was not quite a coward; and in so finding had ceased to be a bully. Armstrong bade him good-by good-naturedly enough, and then departed without seeing Nettie, who had been "taken with a severe headache," and could see no one.

He left Brintonville with a feeling of gloom and despondency, very different from that with which he entered it, and took the western-bound train for his own home, resisting the invitations of the St. Aures to come with them to New York and enjoy himself.

"No, General," he said; "I have followed a will o' the wisp long enough, and neglected the people at home for pleasure. It serves me right to have lost everything for which I came. Good-by, Mrs. St. Aure, till we meet at Marengo." Then he was gone on his way to Illinois.

There is something in a railroad journey of a thousand miles, more or less, that is never very exhilarating, and when the way lies along the Lake Shore road the prospect is doubly dreary. Armstrong started on his journey, suffering from depression of spirits, and by the time he reached Illinois he was ready to grumble at all mankind. Nothing pleased him, and the manners and customs of the inhabitants least of all. Once on a time—so he reflected—he had known no better. The rough and hearty manners of the prairie population had been those of his youth, and he had been interested in the price of corn and hogs, in the political prospects of Justice Jenkins, Sheriff Shadwell, Constable Creamer and State Senator Smith. He had *heard of* little else when he was a boy, and had acquired

that degree of interest in those enlivening topics which comes of acquaintance with the men and absence of other interests. Now it was different. He came back to the thriving town of Podunk Flats, and lo! it had diminished before his eyes to such a size that he felt almost ashamed to have ever considered it a place fit to live in.

He gazed with thoughtful disgust at the principal hotel of the town, which he had once looked upon as a palace of luxury. It had shrunk to the dimensions of a shabby country tavern, where they fried their beefsteaks and mutton chops in lard, and served sole-leather pies for dessert. Armstrong arrived hungry, and intended to have dined at the "Henry Clay House" before he went home, but the sight of the dinner repelled him, and he left as hungry as he entered, determined to eat nothing till he arrived home. The fact was, that the change from New York and the Beeches to the truly democratic style prevalent at the West, was rather discouraging to our young man, who was growing somewhat fastidious, and it was not till he arrived home, at the broad, generous Armstrong farmhouse, that he began to feel comparatively happy once more. Armstrong was a little spoiled, but he was not a snob for all that. When his stalwart white-bearded father met him, the young man felt proud of the old one, as he had reason to be. Father Armstrong was as fine looking an old man as any one could wish to see, and he carried his eighty years as if they had been less than threescore. Although he had passed his life as a farmer, he had read not a little, and possessed a fund of strong common sense, peculiarly Western and practical. When the neighbors gazed in awe upon the brilliant young officer, and asked the old farmer whether he did not feel proud of his son's success, associating as he might with people whose names were "in the papers, you know, Mr. Armstrong,"

the old gentleman calmly remarked: "Yes, Frank was always a good boy; he always obeyed his parents."

Nothing seemed to overawe this simple son of the West. If he had heard that Frank had been to Europe and danced with the Empress of Russia, or been appointed commander-in-chief of the German army, he would have felt no undue elation or astonishment. "Frank was always a good boy," covered the whole thing to his mind. A good boy could do anything, and nothing was beyond his deserts. Had father Armstrong been an old-country farmer, he would have been elated at the successes which had carried his son to a plane of life above himself, but, being an American, there was an abiding sense of dignity in this plain old farmer that made him equal to any society. He might have committed little solecisms in manners, had he been suddenly placed at a state dinner in Paris; but, as far as ease of bearing and perfect coolness went, he could have figured at a *levée* of the first courts in Europe to good advantage, beside many a rich merchant or banker of the Eastern cities. He was, in fact, a relic of the by-gone times of America in the West, when, if there was, in many people, an absence of refinement of manner, there was, nevertheless, a self-respect and sense of equality between all mankind, as children of a common father, that led to the noblest results in other cases.

Mother Armstrong was a quiet, soft-voiced little woman, with gentle manners and overflowing affection for her son, whose pride and exultation of heart at his success in life was frequently quenched in fears for his spiritual safety. The old lady was a Methodist of the strictest sect, and always carried with her the dread, born of the brimstone sermons of the local preacher, that her darling might be snatched away from her forever, for the lack of some mysterious ceremony that the Reverend Boanerges Thompson called "a change of heart." She embraced Frank with

energy and rapture when he first came in, and all the proud mother shone in her eyes and trembled in her voice, as she said:

"My boy! How you have grown! And what an air he has, father! Won't the folks stare when we go to church next Lord's Day, and they see our boy has come home! Oh, Frank, we read all about you in the papers, and your terrible wound, my boy. How is the poor arm? I declare I'm a'most afraid to touch you. But that sling, somehow, looks kinder pretty, after all."

"Oh, the arm's all right, mother," said Frank, smiling. "I suppose I might have dropped the sling before this, but some one's sure to run up against me on that side if I don't hang out the sign, so the doctor told me I'd better keep the sling till I got quite well. Did you get my last letter?"

"Yes, my boy, yes; and I was *so* glad to hear of that good General thanking you before all the folks. It made us all feel good, I tell you. And what did they make you, Frank—a captain, or general, or something of that sort?"

"Well, no, mother——"

"A sergeant, or a colonel, perhaps?"

"No, no, mother. I went out a lieutenant, and I come back as I went. It's higher than a sergeant, but not as good as a captain or colonel."

"And you're sure you read your Bible, regular, every night, Frank?" said the old lady, suddenly remembering her minister's injunctions and the conventionalities of life. "Remember that all the glories of this world are but filthy dross if you don't attend to the duties you were taught as a child."

"Yes, yes, mother," said the young man, evasively; "that's all right; but, do you know that I feel uncommonly hungry just now, and couldn't eat a mouthful at that con—— I mean at the Henry Clay House. They

don't cook like you do, mother. No one does, I think, sometimes."

Frank was growing to be a man of the world, and understood the art of flattery, it will be perceived. Even if an old lady be as submissive as a babe to the dicta of the Reverend Thompsons of this world, she is still accessible to flattery on her points of especial pride, and mother Armstrong believed that no woman in Podunk County could *quite* come up to her in the preparation of pork and beans and similar rural dishes, not to mention pickles. So that Frank escaped further lectures by appealing to the weaknesses of the lecturer, and before dinner was over the subject of polemics was forgotten for the time.

How it happened, those who are skilled in the wiles of femininity can tell, but it is a fact that the Armstrong mansion received quite a number of visitors that evening. That Deacon Podgers should drop in to have a pipe with father Armstrong and discuss the prospects of the next election for governor, was not surprising, but that Miss Jemima Podgers should happen to require a receipt for pumpkin pie, and should come over to ask Mrs. Armstrong how to make one, was a thing unprecedented. Mother Armstrong was a good woman and a Christian, but somehow she suspected Jemima's new-born devotion to cookery, the more so, as the young woman had never been famous for anything but a fondness for frizettes and fancy neckties, and was looked on by the housewives of Podunk Flats as "kinder flyaway and flirty."

However, it must be confessed that Jemima Podgers, despite her homely name, was a pretty country girl, hale and hearty, loud-voiced and fresh, with flashing black eyes, and hair that no amount of frizzing could quite ruin. She displayed the greatest amazement and confusion when she found that the son of the house had returned from the *wars,* and vowed that she "never would have come over

ef she'd ha' known that Mister Frank was come hum agen. Didn't want to disturb the family on the very first night. But, oh! she had read all about him in the papers, and about those horrid Injuns. And how is your poor arm, Mr. Frank? I hardly dare to shake hands with you."

Jemima Podgers's visit was of course excusable, her father being an old crony of father Armstrong, but when Squire Tobin came in to ask the price of some hogs that the farmer was fattening, it did seem rather suspicious that Miss Lucy Tobin should find it necessary to come with him. Lucy had no interest in hogs, beyond spending the revenue that accrued from the paternal pork-packing establishment, and as her father was the richest man in Podunk Flats, it was seldom that she visited among the farmers. Miss Lucy had been to boarding-school, and had paid one visit to the American paradise, which she frequently spoke of as "Parree." She affected no surprise at meeting Armstrong, being a young lady who had seen the world and mingled with the "best society of Parree" (not to speak of the *commis voyageurs* who scraped acquaintance with the squire on the road to "Parree"). Of course, when so accomplished a young lady as Miss Tobin visited the Armstrongs, an adjournment from the sitting-room to the "best parlor" became necessary, and as that parlor contained a piano (used once a year on the average, but forced on the Armstrongs by an importunate agent), it was a natural thing for Miss Lucy to be asked to sing and play. Poor Jemima, with her provincial beauty and honest, rough, red hands, was reduced to a cypher by the fastidious heiress of the Tobin pork-packing establishment, and was doomed to sit in the corner, nursing her jealousy, while Miss Lucy sang "Robert, toi que j'aime" in the most finished manner, for the special benefit of Frank. Of course, the young man was not displeased. Young men seldom are when pretty girls are pulling caps for them,

and Miss Lucy was a nice, brown-eyed, brown-haired young woman, of much superficial reading, and very quick at repartee. She reigned that night as queen of the gathering, for gathering there very soon was. It was surprising how many people had business with father or mother Armstrong that evening, and how many worthy couples brought their daughters. The barnyard shed was full of sleighs, and the horses shook their bells in unison about midnight, and agreed that this coming home of young army officers was a decided nuisance, if the girls of the neighborhood got wind of the fact. The only veterinary surgeon of Podunk Flats afterward declared that he traced no less than seven cases of cracked heels, lung fever, and cough to the time those horses stood under that shed that night.

However, it was all over at last, and the Armstrong family retired to rest with various feelings. The old people were tired and sleepy, but Frank was a little excited. The great majority of the girls repelled him by their loudness, but Lucy Tobin was so different that he could not help thinking of her with some pleasure. Had he been a by-stander, and seen her practising her blandishments on another in his place, he might have recognized the fact that she was really an affected, superficial young woman, slightly under-bred and wholly pretentious; but few men have the coolness to judge a woman dispassionately when she expresses a decided preference for their society, and when she is contrasted with others so much more objectionable as to serve as foils to set her off.

Thus it happened that before Armstrong had been many days home, the young women of Podunk Flats ceased to come to the house regularly, while Frank became a frequent visitor at the Tobin mansion. He was always sure of a pleasant welcome there, and Miss Tobin gave him a special corner of the sofa, with a special soft pillow whereon to repose his "poor arm"; while Père Tobin was sure

to be employed in the packing-house whenever Mr. Armstrong called, and Mére Tobin had long ago left this mortal scene, so that Armstrong had, if he wished it, a clear field to himself. Miss Lucy, an only daughter and an heiress, had a shrewd notion of the possibilities of life, and her father was not the one to oppose her. She had found in "Parree" that money alone was not sufficient to purchase entrance into the "best society," and had noticed further that army officers went anywhere and everywhere in most countries. Without reasoning on the mediæval origin of this respect for the military caste, she recognized it, and set her cap boldly to win the first available army officer, stamped with the sign-manual of the Academy. How far she might have succeeded in the present case is an open question, but she certainly had the advantage of catching Armstrong's heart on the rebound, at a time when he was full of mortification and wounded feeling. Whether Miss Lucy suspected this or not, is one of those questions which it is impossible to decide by direct evidence, but it is certain that this young lady was exceedingly shrewd and remarkably well informed as to Armstrong's antecedents. Moreover, she had visited West Point on her return from "Parree," and had found out a great deal more about Armstrong than that young gentleman suspected. It was, of course, the most natural thing in the world for Miss Tobin to ask after the playmate of her childhood, appointed from the district in which she was born, and it was equally natural that she should get all the information she desired, cadets being notoriously as pliable as wax in the hands of any young lady who knows her business, besides being always ready to impart information on any and all subjects in the universe, to any and all persons who are good listeners. With Miss Lucy's experience and opportunities, it is therefore not surprising that, when she happened to meet Cadet Lobbs, Third Class, she quickly induced that inno-

cent youth to make a clean breast to her of all the doings on a certain memorable evening, when poor Lobbs had been victimized in the most shameless manner by a young lady of the name of Nettie Dashwood. We have the less hesitation in using this language, having Miss Dashwood's own authority for the fact that she had treated young Lobbs "shamefully." Possibly it was Miss Tobin's success in the role of consoler to Lobbs, that inspired her with the idea of consoling Armstrong likewise. Certain it is that she had several very ardent epistles from the unhappy third class cadet stowed away in her drawer up stairs, and equally certain that before the week in which Armstrong came home was out, he and she began to practise duets together.

It must be confessed that Miss Lucy was wise in her generation. Her treatment of Armstrong was inexpressibly soothing to his vanity, and they had already progressed to the point where it became "Frank" and "Lucy" between them, when one day, as the young officer drove home in the afternoon past the post-office, he received three letters, destined to effect a complete revolution in his sentiments and make him forget Lucy Tobin as completely as if she had never lived.

Of these three letters one was enclosed in a big envelope, marked in the corner "HEADQUARTERS MILITARY DIVISION OF THE ATLANTIC, OFFICIAL BUSINESS"; the second was marked "WAR DEPARTMENT, OFFICIAL BUSINESS"; while the third was addressed in a lady's hand, not known to him, but post-marked in New York.

Naturally, this was the one that the young man opened first. Ask any youth of his age whether he would not have done the like. It began, "Dear Mr. Armstrong," and he saw that it was quite long, so he turned to the signature. Then he felt a thrill of joy. The letter was signed "Elsie St. Aure," and he knew Mrs. St. Aure well

enough to think that she would not have written to him except to send him some good news.

Then he opened his official documents. The War Department letter was a special order directing "Second Lieutenant Francis Armstrong to report at once to the assistant adjutant-general, Headquarters Military Division of the Atlantic, for special duty on a board of officers convened in the city of New York, Lieutenant Armstrong to act as recorder for the board." The other document was an official copy of the same order, regularly transmitted.

Then he turned to Mrs. St. Aure's letter for an explanation of all this, and what he read made his face flush and his eyes glitter in spite of himself. The kind lady told him that General St. Aure had interested himself to obtain this appointment for the young officer, which would keep him in New York till the spring, when they were all going back to Marengo. The board was to examine and report upon certain systems of firearms to be brought before it, and was in fact one of those cut-and-dried, routine organizations, so plentiful in every over-officered army in time of peace. But all these things passed lightly over Armstrong's mind as he came to the last sentence of the letter, which caused him to turn very red and rush to his mother, telling her that he "must go to New York at any hazard by the very next train." The good lady was astonished, and reminded him that he was still on sick-leave. "Surely the President don't want you to run away and fight the Indians again, till you are well, my son."

Then it was that Armstrong again exhibited his capacity for managing his respected parent. When she threatened him with duty he had treated her to blandishment; but now that she proposed a modification of the rigors of martial law, he became more than Roman in his severity. He showed his innocent mother the printed order and the

written one, both directing Lieutenant Armstrong to report "at once" to New York for duty, and completely subjugated the old lady by the following virtuous appeal to her sense of duty:

"Mother, do you think that I, who have been educated by the nation, and trained for the service of arms, dare to hesitate one instant when my country calls me to duty? No, mother, these are the hardships of a soldier's life, of which it is not for us to complain, and he only he is a Christian soldier that can perform his full duty at whatever hazard."

Of course mother Armstrong could make no objection after this, but she wept plentifully while she helped Frank to pack his trunk, and at six o'clock that evening the worthy couple stood on the platform of the station, watching, through dim eyes, the vanishing train that bore away their hope and pride to the Eastern cities, away from the rural quietude of Podunk Flats.

Said father Armstrong that night, as he puffed at his pipe: "Frank's a good boy, Melissy, but—I kinder think there's a gal behind all this, and 'tain't Lucy Tobin, neither."

"Why, father!" exclaimed Mrs. Armstrong. "How you talk! It can't be possible."

And yet father Armstrong was not far wrong, and the old lady suspected it too.

"What makes you think so, father?" she asked, presently. "Did he ever say anything to you?"

"Frank ain't one of the talking kind on them subjects," said father Armstrong, blowing a puff of smoke from his pipe. "But I noticed he looked kinder down-hearted when he came back, and that he didn't tell us anything about them folks he was visiting. Then I noticed that he flushed *up amazing* red when he got that letter from the General's *lady*, and I came to the conclusion that she must have told

him something that pleased him uncommon, and *you* know, Melissy, that nothing pleases a boy so much as hearing about his gal."

Then father Armstrong subsided into silence and tobacco smoke.

"Well, if it *be* a gal," said the old lady, "I hope she's a good Christian and a good housekeeper, for if she ain't, she and I won't get along together."

And mother Armstrong pursed up her lips as she spoke. Like many other excellent women, as a mother-in-law she was liable to be troubled about many things.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BUTTON AND CHAIN.

MOST of the passengers were nodding in their seats as the iron horse screamed and tore along through the night, with its long train of cars swinging and swaying behind. The sharp-faced drummers, who had been hard at work all day driving bargains, were peacefully dreaming of fabulous sales, with their heels on the backs of the seats in front of them, sprawling about in all sorts of prosaic and unpicturesque positions; but still one man in the car sat bolt upright, as if sleep were an impossibility to him, while his constant nervous fidgetting told of impatience and anxiety. Of course the experienced reader can divine in a moment who this man was. Naturally it was Armstrong, and he was in that state of fiery impatience, that the miles seemed to crawl by at snail's pace, though in very truth the train was running at thirty-five miles an hour.

Something was running in his mind to make him so eager, and that something was nothing more nor less than the last sentence of Mrs. St. Aure's letter, which he remembered so well: "*I forgot to say that Miss Lacy and her niece have just come down to the city, and are boarding at the same hotel with us, for change of scene.*"

Armstrong read that sentence over and over again, as he sat in the cars, speeding eastward. The light of the swinging lamp was of the worst, but he knew the words by heart, and it was with considerable haste that, on his arrival in New York at last, he rushed to the hotel at which he knew the St. Aures generally stopped. He looked over

the register, and found their names there, all correct; and, some way down, the names of Madam Lacy and Miss Dashwood. He asked for General St. Aure.

He was "out, but expected back very shortly. Is the name Armstrong?"

"Yes."

"The General had left orders to tell the gentleman to come up stairs, and wait for him in the private parlor."

Bell.

"Show this gentleman to 617, Bob."

"All right, sir."

Gentleman follows, and after a journey in the elevator, is taken down a dozen passages, more or less, ending at a door with "617" in black letters thereon.

"General St. Aure's parlor, sir."

The waiter knocks and receives no answer. Again, and he opens the door.

"Guess they'll be in soon, sir. Step in and wait."

The gentleman will do so, and he finds himself in a bright, cheerful parlor, with a sea-coal fire blazing merrily. Then he is left alone and sits down. He has a long time to wait. It is afternoon when he comes, and it is dusk before any one molests him. Then, as he is poking the fire and thinking over all sorts of things, prominent among which are his brightening prospects on staff duty, the door opens softly and some one comes in, who says, in a sweet voice:

"Why, Colonel Jim, are you all alone in the dark? I've just come in with Mrs. St. Aure, and she sent me to find you and bring you down to Aunt Isabel's parlor. We're to go to——"

Armstrong had paused with the poker in his hand, and his heart was throbbing strangely. He knew that voice, but he spoke no word. He only gave a vicious dig at the lump of coal before him, and it fell to pieces and blazed up

brightly, just as Nettie Dashwood laid her hand on his shoulder.

Then he looked up and their eyes met.

Nettie uttered a low cry of amazement; the color rushed all over her face, and she stammered:

"I didn't know—I beg—I thought——"

Then she started back, put her hands to her face, as if to hide it, and would have run for the door, when Armstrong suddenly jumped up, made a step forward, and placed his hand on her arm. In a moment she had faced him, with a strange look of pride, fear and anger, all together, utterly amazing him, and said, in a low tone:

"How dare you, sir? Take your hand off, instantly, if you are a gentleman!"

Stung to the quick, he obeyed her, took up his hat, and passed to the door. Laying his hand on the lock, he bowed very low, and said, in the bitterest tone he could assume:

"I humbly crave your pardon, Miss Dashwood. Since I am become so hateful to one whom I once fancied my friend, I will not offend you with my presence. I came to see General St. Aure, but I will call again."

Then, holding his head high, he was about to leave the room, when Nettie, in a very faint voice, said:

"There is no need to go, Mr. Armstrong. I will go instead. This is not my room."

"I could not think of dispossessing you," he answered, still more bitterly. "I am aware that you expected to see *some one else.* I suppose you will not consider that supposition a fresh insult; though, upon my soul, I cannot see what I ever did to Jim St. Aure that he should set you against me as he has."

He broke off, with the first symptom of agitation in his voice, for at the moment he felt cut to the heart, and the *tears* started in his eyes with mortification and wounded

feeling. The firelight was so bright that Nettie could see his face, and it looked very handsome and very angry in the bright glow. He could not see hers, for it was in shadow; but he heard her say, almost in a whisper:

"Colonel St. Aure never set me against you, Mr. Armstrong."

"Then what, I ask you—I think I have a right to ask you——" began the young man, in a tone of exasperation, and for a moment abandoning his intention of going away—"yes, I *have* a right to ask you, what is the meaning of all this sudden coldness to me? Answer me, Nettie Dashwood—what have I done?"

He spoke in a tone as if he felt outraged. To his surprise the little woman drew herself up as haughtily as a princess. When she spoke, her tones were clear and as cold as icicles of sound could be imagined.

"Upon my word, Mr. Armstrong, you talk of rights as if you supposed I were a schoolgirl and you my master. You have no *right* to ask me anything. I am not a child, sir."

The rebuff did Armstrong good, and it caused a certain strange, dull feeling at his heart such as he had never experienced before. He suddenly grew pathetic.

"Then you will not tell me what I have done to offend you. I thought you were my friend once, Nettie. I can search my heart, and say that I can remember no thought that was treason to you, and yet——"

"And yet what?" she asked in the same clear, icy tones.

"And yet I find that when I meet you, after coming back from the jaws of death, you treat me as a stranger," he answered sadly.

Nettie laughed, a strange, bitter laugh.

"Yes, you went into the jaws of death—and for whose sake? You could remember your *friend*, to give her a

letter that tore her heart asunder with pity for you, and yet you could not send her so much as one poor little lock of hair to remember you by."

She suddenly changed her tone to one of angry intensity.

"I burnt that hair you sent me for *her*, sir," she said. "Oh, you were a fine friend to *me!*"

Armstrong stood perfectly astounded a moment, and then a sudden light broke over his face. He was not by any means a fool. He spoke very gently:

"Miss Dashwood, it is not possible that you opened my letter. I never was captured by the Indians."

"We thought you were," she answered in a weary tone; and then suddenly flushed up and started for the door, for neither was she slow-witted, and she began to see whither the conversation was tending. "Let me out, sir," she said angrily. "I insist on your leaving that door."

But, for some reason or other, Armstrong had changed his mind. He set his back against the door and said:

"I shall *not* leave it. You have evaded me for weeks, and when I see the possible happiness of a life slipping away from both of us, I shall not let my share go without a struggle."

She stood before the door, panting, a moment.

"*Will* you let me go, sir?" she said, stamping her foot, and trying to cow him with her eyes.

"I will *not*," he said firmly. "I've made up my mind you shall hear me, and you shall."

She curled her lip, and went and sat down by the fire without another word, but she trembled a great deal. The fire continued to blaze as brightly as ever, and the brilliant glow of a reflector from a shop on the other side of the street sent quite a flood of light against the wall, so that *he* could see her plainly. She had just come in from walking, and wore a suit of dark blue trimmed with fur,

and a jaunty little fur cap, under which her sunny curls rippled down to her neck. It seemed impossible for this little creature to be dangerous, and yet she did not lack spirit, as he knew. Armstrong came and stood by her on the hearthrug, and saw that her face was set in an expression of peculiar pride and anger, her lips firmly closed as she looked at the fire. With a nervous, angry motion, she threw one end of her boa back over her shoulder, and said in her coldest tone:

"Well, sir, I'm waiting. What have you to say to me?"

"Listen, Nettie," said Armstrong in a soft, grave voice, as he looked down at her. "There was once a young man who made a great mistake in life. He mistook matter for spirit, and fancied that a beautiful face meant a beautiful soul. All the while, this young man had a friend whom he did not know to be an angel, entertained unawares. Time passed on, till he was once in grave peril of his life, and at such times the spiritual vision clears. Then he saw his mistake, and how do you think he found it out?"

"I am not good at riddles," she said coldly, and she turned away her face that he might not see it.

Then Armstrong smiled as he looked down, and said:

"He remembered, in the moment when his death was almost certain, *not* the woman he thought he loved, but her who was only his friend."

Nettie started and turned her face to the fire, while she began to twitch her lips slightly.

"I cannot tell you," pursued the young man softly, "how long it was before the image of the woman he thought he loved faded away entirely before the image of her he thought his friend. But he found his mistake when it was too late, and he paid the penalty, as he deserved."

"How?" asked Nettie in a low tone.

Then she seemed to feel overpowered with the heat, for she impatiently unhooked her boa and threw her muff aside, while she unbuttoned the front of her sacque and seemed to be fidgetting with something that had caught there.

Armstrong stood and watched her with some surprise, for she seemed to be more pettish than ever, though not so stonily severe as at first.

"How did he find out his mistake—this bright young man that you speak of?" asked the girl presently, in a sarcastic tone, and as she spoke she seemed to be playing with her watch charms, for she swung something bright to and fro, and twisted a black chain round her finger.

Armstrong felt offended in his turn, and he said coldly:

"Because he found that the woman he thought to be his friend, the dearest and truest that man ever had, the woman whom he knew, too late, that he loved better than his own soul, had changed her whole nature, and from a frank, innocent, true-hearted comrade, had become a capricious coquette, who laughed at his penitence and sneered at his love, while she played with a confounded trumpery little watch charm."

He ended in a tone of undisguised irritation; for he was exasperated by the cavalier way in which she was treating him. To his surprise she smiled at the fire and said quietly:

"It *is* a trumpery little thing, isn't it? You wouldn't give a button for it."

He made no answer, but turned on his heel and went to the table.

"Very well, Miss Dashwood," he said bitterly, "I don't think I deserve these humiliations. The young man *was* myself, as you know, and *you* are the woman I love. You may tell your friends, if you please, that you had your

triumph in rejecting me scornfully, with a contempt of manner more cutting than words. Good-by, Nettie; God bless you. I suppose you're to make Jim happy. Well, it serves me right. Good-by."

He ended in his most mournful tones, and was moving to the door, when he heard Nettie make a remark so purposeless that its very absurdity checked him.

"What do *you* wear for a watch charm, Mr. Armstrong?" she asked in an airy tone.

"I don't wear any," he said gruffly, and put his hand on the door knob. He thought she was laughing at him.

"*I do*," she said quietly, "and I want to see if you can match this one for me."

Armstrong stood at the door and looked over at the fire. She had turned away her head, and he could see her curls fluttering, as if she was trembling violently. He suddenly strode over to the fire and knelt down beside her.

"What do you mean, Nettie?" he asked in a hoarse voice. "Don't trifle with me. What do I care about watch charms."

"It was very cheap," she answered with a mischievous smile. "And yet *it was all he ever gave her.*"

She held something hidden in her hand as she spoke, and Armstrong began to tremble in his turn. She kept only her profile to him, but glanced slyly at him every now and then. Without knowing why, he put one arm round her and closed the other hand over hers.

"What is that you have there?" he asked, with a strange flutter at his heart.

Nettie made no answer whatever, but she turned very pale and trembled.

"What is it, Nettie?" he asked again in a pleading tone.

He felt her hand relax, and he softly pulled away the

chain from the passive fingers, then looked in wonder at that poor little button, which had lain all these years over Nettie's heart.

As he looked, a great wave of reverential affection seemed to sweep over the young soldier. He knew that button in an instant, with his own initials engraved by his own hand. He remembered, as if it were yesterday, the careless ease with which he had given it to the little schoolgirl, to bribe her to be his friend with her handsome cousin. He remembered in that moment every word of the letter which she had read when she thought him dead, and it flashed over him of a sudden how he must have tortured that sensitive nature to make it the confidante of his love for another. In that moment, before the unconscious revelation of the simplicity and constancy of this innocent girl's affection, Armstrong felt as if she were miles away from him and above him, in all her weakness. He held the little emblem in his hand and looked at it, his eyes filling with tears.

"And you have kept this all these years in memory of me?" he said in a low tone. "I'm afraid I'm not worth so much love, my darling."

He bowed his head and reverently kissed her little hand as he spoke. Then he said very simply:

"Nettie, I am a poor soldier, but I love you dearly. Will you be my wife?"

Nettie laid her other hand on his head, and gently stroked his hair.

"I'm afraid I can't say 'no' now, Frank," she said, with a strange smile lingering on her lips. "You wouldn't take the button back when I offered it to you at West Point, but you'll have to take it now, along with me."

There was a short period of comparative silence, and *then* Armstrong said thoughtfully:

"*Whose* hair is that, Nettie?"

He was looking at the chain. Nettie's face clouded and her eyes filled with tears.

"It is *hers*, Frank," she said, in a low tone. "I was so proud of her in those days, and I loved her so dearly. Ah, Frank, I cannot believe but what that wretch bewitched her in some way. He used to frighten me out of my life whenever I saw his evil eyes."

Armstrong patted her hand as he knelt by her, looking thoughtfully at the fading fire.

"He was a strange fellow, Mac Diarmid. He had a wonderful magnetic power about him, so one of the professors said. Have they been traced, Nettie?"

"To the French steamer, and Aunt Isabel is satisfied that they are somewhere in France."

"Ah, well," said Armstrong, thoughtfully, "his blood will not condemn him there. I'm not sure, Nettie, that we Americans are not unjust to his race; and the time may come when we shall pay——"

A rapid step, and the door flung open. General and Jim St. Aure burst in.

"Hilloa, Elsie! What's the matter, little woman? All in the dark. Why, what—who's this? Armstrong!"

Armstrong had started up at the sound of the opening door, and stood in front of his chief at "attention."

"Mrs. St. Aure has not been here, sir. I've been waiting for you since four o'clock."

Here Nettie, who had been stealing round in the gloom, for the fire had again sunk to a red glow, flitted past Jim St. Aure to the door, and was utterly discomfited by that eccentric bachelor, who opened it for her and bowed low as she was passing out, saying:

"Good evening, Miss Dashwood."

As soon as the door was closed, the General strode to the mantelpiece and lighted the gas, his features screwing into all sorts of grimaces. Then he turned on Armstrong,

"Well, sir, so you've reported at last. I suppose you've heard that the department isn't going to allow any more of this sick-leave extension business. You're to be put on duty in the Department of the East till next May, when you will rejoin your company at Marengo. The government doesn't encourage young officers to idle away their time anywhere—except on duty."

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you, General," said the young man, gratefully, "for procuring me this detail. I only hope, sir, that you may never repent your kindness to me, ever since we met."

St. Aure suddenly changed his manner to that of easy familiarity.

"When is it to come off, Armstrong? I suppose you've settled it."

Armstrong colored and stammered:

"What, General? I don't——"

"It's all settled, Bertie," said Jim St. Aure, who was lighting a cigar at the further end of the room. "It's lucky for you, Armstrong, that you came when you did, for I can tell you I was making hay while the sun shone."

Then Jim strode off with his hands in his pockets to his own room, where, for some reason or other, he fell into a brown study, and sat blinking at the fire and smoking furiously till the waiter summoned him to supper.

In the mean time, a conversation that was taking place in another room down stairs, some time after Nettie Dashwood had blundered innocently into the St. Aure parlor, may serve to explain something to those readers whose vision stops at the outside of the millstone.

Mrs. St. Aure and Madam Lacy were seated in opposite rocking chairs, and Madam Lacy observed:

"I think they must have come to an understanding by *this* time, my dear, or Nettie would have come back. He *was* there, for the waiter said so."

Mrs. St. Aure smiled brightly.

"*I* never doubted it would all come right. Do you remember what I told you at Fort Marengo? I felt, then, that she would belong to us, in time. But I confess I was afraid when she insisted on going away. I thought that when he came back, all could have been so easily arranged."

"Humph!" said the old lady drily. "You didn't know the Lacy blood. Did you think *my* niece would jump into any man's arms?"

Mrs. St. Aure smiled, but looked a little provoked.

"I don't see why any of my boys should be made unhappy for a mere scruple of pride, and he certainly was as miserable as I ever saw any one."

"Did him good," said Madam Lacy promptly. "Young men are always conceited at best, but when they're in the army they're the worst puppies I know of. He can thank his stars I'm a foolish old woman and Nettie a perverse young one, or he'd never have got her. But girls are all the same. You may love them and toil for them till you go to your grave, and they lose sight of it all in the end, in the gleam that shines from a gilt button."

And the old lady turned to her crochet with a sniff of wounded feeling.

Mrs. St. Aure spoke in her gentle tones:

"But they go to make another home happy, Miss Lacy, and surely the mission of a cultivated and intelligent woman at a frontier fort, softening the hard features of a rugged life, is one which any true woman might be proud to fill."

Miss Lacy pursed up her lips.

"It's all very well, but it does not console me for the loss of my only companion in my old age. She'll go out there, and I shall never see her again."

Mrs. St. Aure looked deprecatingly at her.

"I don't see why that need be. She can come back to you whenever he goes on duty."

"Yes, and then she'll be mourning for *him* all the time, and that's complimentary to *me!* The fact is, soldiers have no business to marry, and I've a good mind to withhold my consent unless he leaves the army."

Mrs St. Aure was horrified.

"But consider that all his career lies there, Miss Lacy. What could he do, outside?"

"He could live like a gentleman and earn his living at the same time," said the old lady positively. "I can be liberal when I please. He shall study law or something."

But whatever further plans Miss Lacy might have made, they were frustrated by the sudden entrance of Nettie Dashwood, who flew at her aunt and buried her face in her lap. Miss Lacy stroked her hair silently, and Mrs. St. Aure watched them through the fire-lit dusk with a smile.

Presently the girl said, in a smothered voice:

"You knew we were there all the time, and you let *them* come in. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Aunt Isabel."

Mrs. St. Aure smiled.

"Who is *them*, Nettie?"

"The General and Jim. Oh, I thought I should have died when they saw me!"

Then the General's wife drew the fair head away from Miss Lacy to her own bosom, and encircled it with her arm.

"My dear," she said, "there is nothing to be ashamed of. You belong to us now."

THE END.

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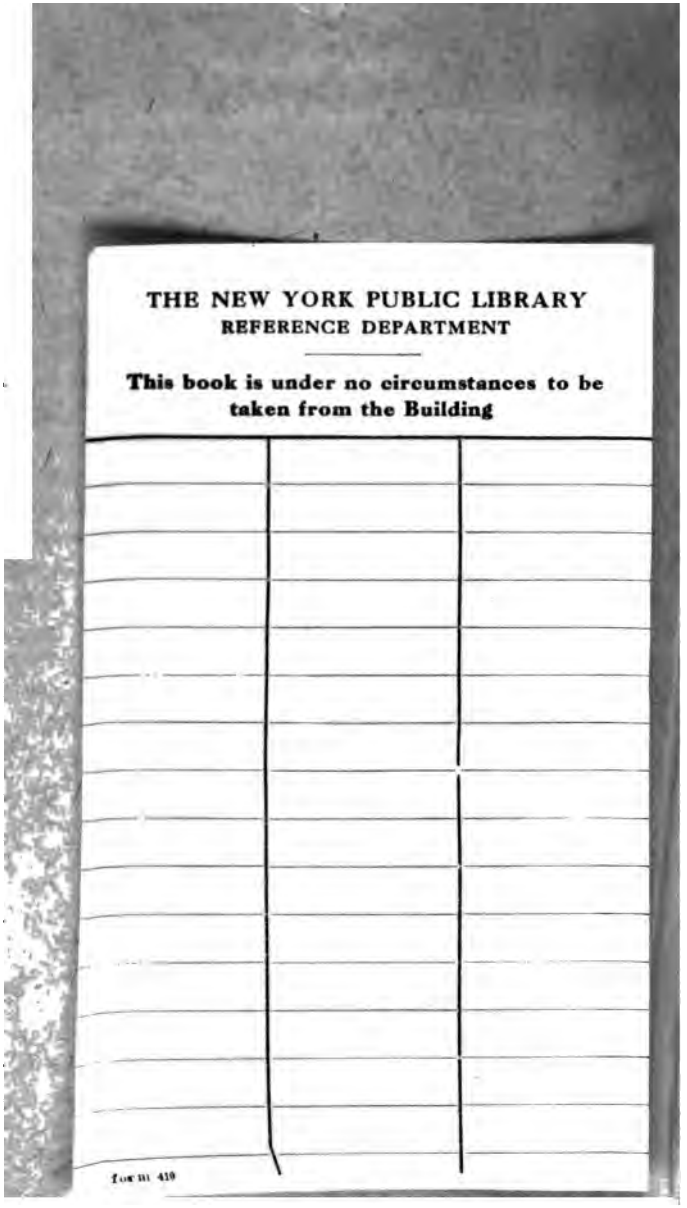
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